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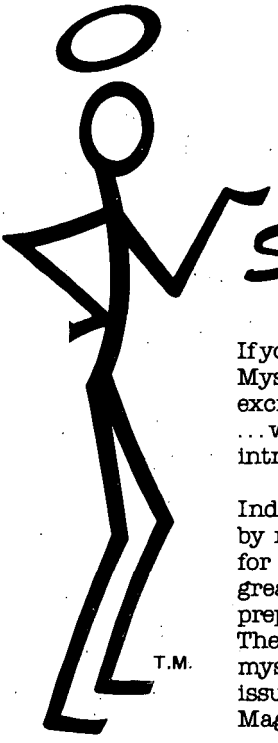


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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Colleen Kobe's clever story "Death of a Dieter" in this issue concerns a young woman challenged to unravel a mystery as part of an examination. The prize: membership in a mystery-solvers' club. Now—subscribers and *early* newsstand buyers take note—the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 1047 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15232, is offering a real-life prize of $250—not for solving a crime but for thinking up the winning plot to be presented at their annual "Murder Mystery Day" on September 16th. Entries must be received by June 30th; they should consist of "an outline for a murder mystery plot, set in the 1920's" and "detailed character sketches of each character involved." Eight to ten characters are wanted, ones that can be acted out effectively. "The mystery will be solved by viewing evidence and by participants questioning the characters after the crime . . . (subsequent murders during the questioning may be included . . .). The plot must allow for a logical gathering together of the characters, such as at a houseparty or the reading of a will." Please put your name, address, and phone number on each page; the Center "reserves the right to change the winning plot in any way it deems necessary."

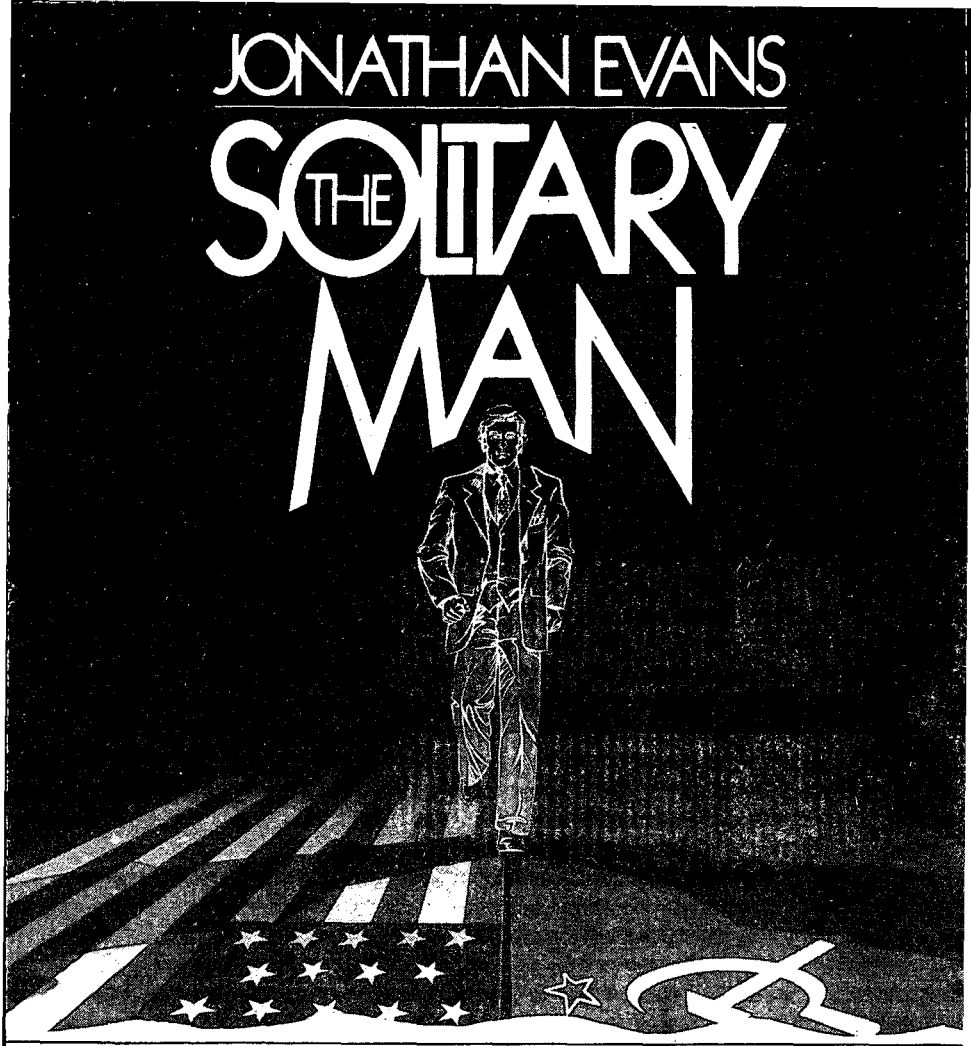
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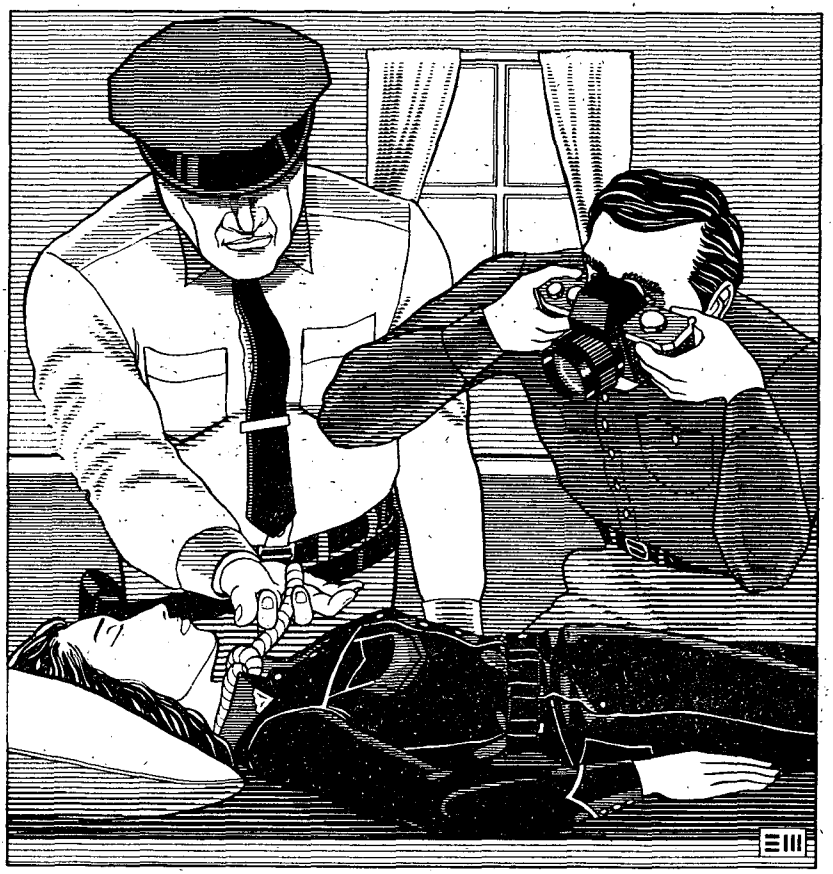
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The Most Beautiful Girl

by Malcolm McClintick

All through the movie Susan Overstreet kept leaning over to whisper to him, asking for comparisons between herself and various actresses in the film. She did it as a joke, she had a strange sense of humor at times, but it irritated Kelso all the same. On the way home he said:

Illustration by Eric Marcus

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"I thought you were a little more level-headed than that."

"Silly. I was only teasing."

But was she? Kelso wondered if she was getting too involved in their relationship. Insecurity might be the first hint. But no, she did like to tease him.

At her house he let her kiss him goodnight, then drove the VW back to his apartment, where the big yellow tomcat demanded food and attention.

"I've got to call Susan first," he told it, picking up the receiver of the kitchen phone. It was a ritual—he always called as soon as he got home from one of their dates. A ritual. He wondered if the relationship was becoming too fixed, too rigid.

"Susan?"

"Hi, George."

The line clicked, meaning there was a call waiting.

"I've got to go," he said. "That's probably the department."

"But we haven't talked yet."

"I'll call you back."

It was the department. He was to meet Detective Sergeant Meyer immediately. He called her back.

"Susan? There's been a homicide. I've got to go."

"Will you call me afterward?"

"Yes, if it's not too late."

"I'll wait up. George? You know that one girl in the movie, the one all the guys thought was so goodlooking?"

"Yes?"

"I thought she was, too."

He hung up, feeling slightly relieved. That sounded more like Susan.

Kelso stared briefly.

Even in death, the murdered girl was one of the most beautiful he'd ever seen. She lay on her back in bed, fully clothed, all in black—black Western-style shirt with pearl snaps, black denim jeans, black Western boots. These, and the blackness of her neck-length hair and arched eyebrows, emphasized the almost marble-like paleness of her skin. A piece of heavy cord had been knotted around her neck. Her expression was pleasant, almost calm. But her lips held a bluish tinge.

The bedroom was on the second floor of a two story townhouse apartment on the city's south side, not far from where Kelso himself lived. He noticed the usual frills kept by single girls rooming together—some stuffed bears, wall posters depicting various rock groups only vaguely familiar to Kelso, a dresser laden with cosmetics, tweezers, combs, and jewelry cases. Two large windows, curtained with some frilly material, overlooked the rear of the apartment.

"Strangled," Detective Sergeant Meyer said, glaring at the dead girl as if it had been

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her own fault that it had happened. "At least that's what somebody wanted us to think. She wasn't, though."

Kelso glanced at the body, then faced Meyer. "She doesn't appear strangled," he said tentatively. "Her face . . . "

"I'm not blind, Kelso."

Near the hall door, two uniformed cops waited, poker-faced, glancing from time to time at the girl's body out of the corners of their eyes. On the other bed sat a plump, plain-faced girl, still wearing a lined raincoat over her sweater and jeans. Her blue socks and blue running shoes matched her sweater. Her hair was short, brown, and in need of combing. Her eyes and nose were red, and she kept sniffing loudly.

"Why don't you take her downstairs?" Meyer muttered, gesturing at the plump girl. "She doesn't need to sit there and look at this." What he meant was that her sniffing was getting on his nerves.

Kelso turned towards the girl. "Miss? Would you mind going downstairs with me?"

"All right." She nodded, sniffed again, then got up and led the way down to the living room, a neat rectangle with a blue upholstered sofa and matching armchairs, a console television set, white pile carpet, and a beamed ceiling. She dabbed at the tears that streaked her fat cheeks and said, "I'm sorry. This is so terrible. Would you like some coffee?"

It was eleven P.M. Kelso took out his pipe, saw there were no ashtrays, put it back inside the pocket of his corduroy jacket, and sat down in one of the armchairs. "No, thank you. Please, sit down. Do you feel like answering a few questions?"

"Yes. I think so." Blowing her nose loudly, she flopped onto one end of the sofa, blinking at him with red-rimmed eyes. "I'm sorry," she said again.

"It's okay. Just take your time. I'm Sergeant Kelso. Can you tell me your name, miss, and your friend's name, and a little about yourselves?"

"I'm Alice Cook," she said, and began talking in a low voice broken occasionally by a sniff. At first it was halting and semi-coherent, but Kelso pieced it together.

Alice Cook was a twenty-three-year-old secretary, sharing the apartment with her roommate, Melanie Foster, also twenty-three, also a secretary. Behind them, across the back walk, lived a guy named Harold DeWitt. Melanie had been something of a flirt, and had talked to DeWitt a few times in the parking lot or, in warm weather, at the apartment's outdoor pool. Melanie had had no intentions of dating the guy;

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when he'd asked her out several times and been turned down, he'd accused her of being a tease and threatened to get even.

Alice Cook sniffed. "I warned her about him constantly. It's dangerous to tease guys like him. But she wouldn't listen —and now look what's happened."

Glancing up from his notes, Kelso asked: "Are you saying you think Harold DeWitt killed your roommate?"

"Probably." Her eyes in her rather puffy face were wide with something—fear, anguish, something. "Sergeant Kelso, he's got pictures of her. I saw them once, when he came over here pretending to borrow some coffee. He had pictures in his wallet, and he got them out and showed them to Melanie."

"Pictures?"

"Yes. Melanie thought it was funny, you know? But it made me mad, and scared, too. He'd shot them down by the pool while she was lying there in her swimsuit, getting a tan. I mean, that's no big deal, but you should've seen his face." She paused to blow her nose. "I knew he was a creep, but I didn't think he was dangerous."

"What time did you get home tonight, Miss Cook?"

"About ten. An hour ago. I'd been at a biology class I'm taking at the university. I went upstairs and found her lying there like that, with that cord tied around her neck, and when I saw she was dead, I called the police. I don't know what I'm going to do now. I just . . ." Lowering her head, she began to sob softly.

Kelso waited awkwardly for her to stop, not knowing what to do in cases of this sort. Female tears made him extremely tense, and he wasn't one of those men who could easily comfort a crying woman. Eventually she stopped, took several deep breaths, and looked up at him with watery eyes.

"Excuse me, Miss Cook," he said, "but there are a few other things I'd like to know. For instance, did he take pictures of both of you, or just . . ." His voice trailed off.

The girl's eyes widened. "Me? I never swim, sergeant. Look at me—I'm fifty pounds overweight. Can you imagine me in a bathing suit? I'm not pretty like Melanie. Men looked at her twice when she walked down the street. Even Harold, who was a rotten creep, never looked at me again after the first time."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't you think I'm terribly ugly, Sergeant Kelso?"

He regarded her. She was, in fact, about fifty pounds overweight. Unlike his own body, which tended to collect some excess around the middle, hers

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had the extra spread all over it. He could sympathize with her. He lived a continuing battle with calories, bathroom scales, desserts, and the waistband of his trousers. But you had to accept reality and keep on walking, you had to like yourself in spite of it all. Or change.

"You shouldn't put yourself down," he said.

"I can't help it, sergeant. Men don't like me. Melanie dated a lot and had a good time. We both graduated from the same high school five years ago, and we're both secretaries, but that's the end of the similarities. She was a great dancer and had lots of boyfriends and went to movies and parties every weekend. Look at me. I look like an elephant on the dance floor. I stay home and read and tend to my insect collection."

Kelso glanced up from his notebook again, feeling embarrassed. He wished she'd stop knocking herself. But he could understand it; living in the shadow of that svelte beauty upstairs could only have bred resentment. And she must have resented Harold, too.

A little seed of doubt popped open in Kelso's mind and began to sprout. Harold DeWitt snapping poolside pictures of Melanie Foster, asking her out, being turned down, and then . . . murdering her . . .

He frowned. "Miss Cook, you say Melanie never went out with Harold?"

"Never. She said he was a nerd. She was satisfied to tease him, you know, flirt with him now and then. And look what *that* got her."

"Uh-huh." He sighed. Something wrong there, maybe. He'd come back to it. Meantime, Meyer was still upstairs. He had to keep the conversation moving. He felt sorry for her. "You say you collect insects?" he asked politely, feigning interest to make her feel better. He hated insect collections. "That's not a bad hobby. Personally, I'd rather do something like that than go to some dumb party."

"Would you really?" She smiled and dabbed at her eyes. "Sergeant, would you like to see my insects?"

He should have known better. But, too late now. "Sure," he lied.

"I've got them right here in this closet." Alice Cook got up, blew her nose, and crossed the room to a small door. She opened it and brought out a heavy glass-covered box about two inches deep and carried it over to Kelso's chair. "See? All kinds."

She held out the box and he took it, resting it on his knees. Under the glass were mounted some fifty or so insects— butterflies, moths, a few dragonflies, and several kinds of bees.

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Kelso knew little about insects. Staring, he tried to think of an appropriate remark.

"Uh, what are those?" he asked, pointing at some fuzzy bee-like things in yellow and black. "Bumblebees?"

"No, those are a type of hornet. Yellowjackets, most people call them. But the honeybees are my favorites. They're so much fun to watch, going from flower to flower. Of course, it's too cold now, they're mostly gone, though I did see one or two the other afternoon when we had that warm spell."

"I see." Kelso shifted the weight of the box on his knees and sighed heavily, wondering how to get out of this and back to the murder investigation. "Honeybees. Yes, they're very interesting. Uh, how do you catch them?"

"Oh, it's easy. If you make them mad or pick one up they'll sting, but otherwise they're not very aggressive, not like hornets. You just pop a killing bottle over them. That's a bottle with poison in it. You shove a stopper into the bottle and the bee dies in a few minutes." She smiled. "I've even caught them with tweezers."

"Huh." Kelso shuddered. Everybody was obsessed with killing things. Personally he preferred his bees live and natural, doing whatever it was they did happily, unmolested by humans. He handed her back the box. "Well, it's a very nice collection."

"Thank you." Her plain face, still red from crying, broke into an even broader smile. It wasn't pretty, but it was better than her frown. She carried the box back to the closet. "It keeps me busy. But it's not a very good substitute for boys." She looked over her shoulder and blinked her eyes. "If you know what I mean . . . "

"Uh, yes. Of course." Was she actually flirting with him? His face went warm. He could think of nothing to say. Footsteps saved him—Detective Sergeant Meyer's small, dark figure coming down the stairs into the living room and scowling around with his usual surly expression. As always, it surprised Kelso to realize that he and Meyer were both thirty-five, considering how much older Meyer looked. Kelso stood up, relieved to have someone else in the room even if it was Meyer.

"Coroner's on his way," Meyer snapped, scowling at the girl. "Well, Kelso, you get anything out of her?"

His usual tactful self, Kelso thought, wincing. "If you mean Miss Cook," he said, a little indignantly, "we had a talk. A guy named Harold DeWitt lives in back and was always asking Melanie out, and he snapped some pictures of her down by

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the swimming pool. Melanie apparently flirted with him but never went out with him." Kelso paused. "DeWitt may have threatened her."

Meyer's dark eyes flashed. "Pictures? Flirting? Threats?" He turned on Alice Cook. "You think he killed your roommate?"

Alice took a step back, as if afraid of Meyer, and sat down heavily on the sofa. "I . . . I don't know. I wouldn't have thought Harold would actually hurt anybody, but he was always watching her, and now . . . I think he did . . . "

"Could he have gotten into this apartment tonight?" Meyer's voice was a whip.

"Well, he . . . " her eyelids fluttered.

"Answer the question!"

Kelso felt sorry for her. There was no reason for Meyer to be so abrasive, except that Meyer was always abrasive. "Uh, maybe we could—" Kelso began.

"Shut up, Kelso. Well, Miss Cook? Could he have gotten in here?"

"He had a key," Alice said, very softly.

"A key!"

"Yes, sir. A key to our apartment. We gave him an extra one a few weeks ago, and he gave us one of his. In case, you know, there was an emergency, and one of us had to get into the other's apartment . . . "

"Real smart," Meyer said. "Kelso, you stay here. I'll go roust this creep out of bed and see what he's got to say for himself."

"Yes, sir," Kelso said, before he could catch himself.

"Don't call me *sir,*" Meyer snapped, and left the apartment.

Kelso sat down opposite Alice Cook again, wondering what to say. "Do you really think Harold killed your roommate?" he asked suddenly. "I mean, why would he?"

"I don't know," Alice said. "People do strange things sometimes. And Harold's pretty strange, you know?"

"But he liked her, didn't he? He was always asking her out, and taking pictures of her? But, you say they didn't date?"

"Never. She refused. She told him he was a sleaze."

Kelso stared. "To his face?"

"You'd have to have known Melanie. She always said what she thought. It seemed to be part of her attraction, with some people." Alice shifted her bulk uncomfortably.

Kelso tried to visualize the guy fascinated with this black-haired beauty, watching her, photographing her, then being told to his face by her that he was sleaze. Would that have driven him to murder?

"Tell me some more about

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Melanie," he said. "Didn't she share any of your interests at all? Collecting? Reading? Anything? Was she taking any university courses?"

Alice shook her head. "We were roommates because we worked in the same office and needed an apartment, and one person couldn't afford this place. And no, she didn't share any of my interests. Just the opposite. My insects, for example. She hated them. She was always threatening to throw them into the garbage. For one thing, she was allergic to honeybees. One stung her once, and she had a really bad reaction. She almost died. Ever since then she keeps a bottle of antihistamines around all the time . . ." She paused, as if thinking of something, then continued emphatically: "And she liked boys too much. Why sit around staring at bugs or waste time reading, she'd say, when you could be out having fun with a boy?" Alice Cook shrugged her round shoulders. "I don't know. We just didn't get along. I guess Harold didn't get along with her, either." She paused, her eyes narrowing, and added: "But he didn't have to kill her."

The front door opened and Detective Sergeant Meyer came in, dragging someone roughly after him. Kelso saw a tall thin young man, in his twenties, gawky and awkward-looking, with sullen eyes, rather rawboned features, and unkempt brown hair. He was in faded jeans, a denim jacket over a white T-shirt, and slippers. Meyer shoved him forcefully into the center of the room and said loudly:

"Here's your murderer!"

"Keep your hands off me," the boy muttered.

"Shut up," Meyer told him. Then, to Kelso: "You ought to see his bedroom. He's got enlarged snapshots of Melanie Foster plastered all across the walls, taken at a pool while she was sunbathing. He must've been obsessed with her."

"It's not illegal to take pictures in public," the kid said, sneering sarcastically.

"It's illegal to kill people," Meyer snapped.

"I didn't kill anybody." He glared from Kelso to Meyer to Alice Cook.

Alice stood up and glared back at him. "I hate you," she said, her voice cracking. "I hate you."

"Excuse me," Kelso said. "I'm Sergeant Kelso. You're Harold DeWitt?"

"This isn't a social club, Kelso." Meyer glared. "I've read him his rights. I say we go ahead and take him downtown and book him on suspicion of murder." He whirled towards the young man. "What's the matter, DeWitt? You couldn't

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stand it that she wouldn't go out with you? You stared at those photos of her till you started hating her guts, then you had to get rid of her, is that it?"

"No—"

"So you came over tonight and used your key to get in. You found her taking a nap. You tried something, maybe she slapped your face. The broad was a flirt, but she couldn't stand you, right? She slapped you and told you to get out, so you hit her. What then, DeWitt? You grabbed her? She screamed? You wrapped that cord around her neck to make her be quiet? Is that how it went?"

"No! That's a lie . . . "

But she wasn't strangled, Kelso was thinking. Meyer was trying to make the kid mad, trying to get him to blurt out the truth. Kelso was thinking something else—something important. Suddenly he said, "Excuse me, I'm going upstairs for a minute."

Meyer scowled but said nothing. Kelso went up to the bedroom, where Melanie Foster's black-clad body still lay on the bed, waiting for the coroner. Her pale face—so smooth, so peaceful, so beautiful. Despite the fact that the cord was tied too loose to strangle her, he saw the blueness of her lips they called cyanosis. He'd noticed it before, but now it meant something.

If DeWitt had killed her, it hadn't been with a piece of cord.

Cyanosis could result from other conditions. Oxygen deprivation. One condition in particular—he couldn't think of the term for it.

But it fit.

Kelso pulled down the collar of the black Western shirt and exposed Melanie Foster's pale neck. Just below the knotted cord he saw a reddish swelling, a tiny hole visible at its center. Just over the jugular.

He sighed and turned away from the girl's body, and left the room. On the dresser he again noticed the pair of tweezers, then went out and down the stairs to the living room.

The front door was just opening. This time it was Dr. Swartz from the coroner's office, a smallish, gray-haired man, fiftyish, peering into the apartment through metal-rimmed glasses.

"How're you doing, Kelso?"

"Hi, Dr. Swartz. You're just in time."

Meyer glared fiercely. "Just in time for what?"

"Sergeant Meyer, Harold didn't kill Melanie Foster."

"What? What are you talking about, Kelso?"

Kelso stepped over to the plump girl and stood looking down at her. He felt sorry for

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her. He understood what it was like to be overweight, to be unpopular, to live in the shadow of more glamorous people. But he also understood that you couldn't kill with impunity, and that it was his job as a detective to find killers and to arrest them.

"Mr. DeWitt," he said, not taking his eyes off Alice, "who gave you the extra key to this apartment?"

DeWitt glowered, sullen again. "Alice Cook. She suggested it herself."

"Dr. Swartz, what's that thing called, when someone has a severe allergic reaction to a chemical, and they go into shock and sometimes die?"

"Oh," Swartz said, "you mean anaphylactic shock?"

"That's it," Kelso said. He looked at Alice again. "Sergeant Meyer noticed right away that Melanie hadn't been strangled. The cord wasn't tight enough. Her facial muscles weren't distorted, her tongue —well, the signs weren't there."

Dr. Swartz regarded Kelso gravely. "Do you know how she died then, Kelso?"

"I think so. There's a swollen place on her neck, just over the jugular vein. The kind of swelling you get, for example . . ." His eyes rested on Alice Cook. ". . . from a bee sting."

Alice made a whimpering noise and started to cry.

Harold DeWitt glared sullenly at everyone.

Meyer looked confused.

"She's got an insect collection," Kelso went on. "I'd say that if you were to open it up and examine the honeybees, you'd find one without its stinger. Melanie Foster was hyperallergic to honeybee venom; she almost died when she was stung once before—Miss Cook told me so herself. If Miss Cook had caught a live bee and kept it in something besides a killing bottle for a time, she could have waited until her roommate was asleep. She could have taken the bee out and held it against her roommate's bare neck—using the tweezers on the upstairs dresser, Miss Cook?—and let it sting. Honeybees lose their stingers and die when that happens, I remember that much from school. Then she could have put the dead bee in her collection box, with the others, and used the tweezers to remove the stinger from Melanie's neck."

Dr. Swartz frowned. "It's possible. If the girl was very allergic. Especially a sting right over the jugular, venom would have circulated instantly." He considered it. "Shock would have occurred quickly, shortness of breath, unconsciousness. Hmm. She could have been dead within several minutes."

"She had pills," Kelso told

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him. "Antihistamines. Could they have helped her?"

"If she'd gotten to them quick enough, maybe," Swartz said. "A number of them. Interesting. I'll go up and examine the body." They heard his footsteps on the stairs.

Meyer growled, "All right, where's this collection box?"

"Over there," Kelso said. "In that closet. And I think I want a look at her antihistamines—"

Alice Cook jumped to her feet and cried: "You don't have to!" Red-faced, she sank back onto the sofa. Suddenly she began speaking, so softly that at first Kelso didn't realize she was doing it:

"I hated her. She was so much prettier than me and more popular with all the boys. She laughed at me. She told me exactly what she thought—that I was fat and plain and Harold would never want to ask me out. I hated her so much. I hated Harold, too. I wanted you to think it was him . . . "

Gently, Kelso asked, "Then you admit it?"

She said nothing else until they'd gotten the insect box out and opened it. They found a honeybee lying loose in the box, not even mounted yet, and showed it to Dr. Swartz, who had come back down. Swartz held it close to his glasses lenses and said, "It doesn't have its stinger."

Then, "I killed her," said Alice Cook.

She sat on the sofa and spoke in a surprisingly calm voice. The tears were gone.

"I took the bee out with a pair of tweezers," she said, "after Melanie went up to take a nap. I waited till she was asleep, then I went up and pressed the bee against her neck. It stung, of course, since I'd agitated it by picking it up. I pulled it away, leaving the stinger in her neck." She paused and a curious glint came into her eyes. "Did you know that the stinger is a little organism? Did you know it keeps pumping venom even after it's been ripped from the bee's abdomen? It's a muscular response." No one spoke. A strange, almost intent look came over her, as if she were concentrating on something very hard. "I put the dead bee back in the box. Melanie woke up right away, from the pain. I told her one of my bees had gotten loose and stung her. I gave her a bunch of her pills and made her lie down again. She started to choke and couldn't breathe, but I held her for a while and then she was quiet. Then I tied that cord around her neck, so it'd look like someone had strangled her."

Swartz glanced at Kelso and said, "Definitely anaphylaxis. She must've been extremely al-

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lergic. Dead about two hours, I'd say."

"The pills," Kelso said, watching Alice Cook. "The antihistamines."

"Oh, those." Almost innocently she blinked at Kelso and said, "They were in capsules. I pulled them apart and repacked them several days ago, with sugar . . . "

Kelso apologized to Harold DeWitt, who promised to sue the police department collectively and also Detective Sergeant Meyer individually and went back to bed. Alice Cook was read her rights and taken downtown by Meyer and two uniformed cops to be booked. On the way out of the apartment Dr. Swartz grinned at Kelso and said:

"You were guessing a little, weren't you, Kelso? What if some of those other bees hadn't had their stingers?"

"The autopsy will confirm the presence of honeybee venom in her system, won't it?"

"Yep, most likely."

"Well, I was only guessing a little," Kelso said, and smiled.

Back in his apartment, Kelso fed his big yellow tomcat and phoned Susan Overstreet.

"Are you still up?" he asked.

"Yes. I told you I'd wait. Are you coming over?"

"Be there in twenty minutes."

"It was murder," he told her, after she'd sat him on her sofa and given him a cup of coffee and a doughnut. "A girl killed her roommate."

"How awful. Why?"

"Jealousy," Kelso said. "She was very plain and overweight. Her roommate was popular and beautiful. One of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen, as a matter of fact."

Susan frowned peevishly and crossed her arms over her chest the way she did whenever something irked her. Kelso pretended not to notice how her dark brown eyes contrasted nicely with her soft blonde hair.

"More beautiful, even," she asked, "than me?"

You are, thought Kelso, the most beautiful girl in the world—but he was sure she'd only get a swelled head if he told her that, even if she was only teasing, so instead he said: "Well, comparisons are always difficult."

And when she smirked at him he knew he was right.

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FICTION

Boat Ride To Nowhere

by Kenneth Gavrell

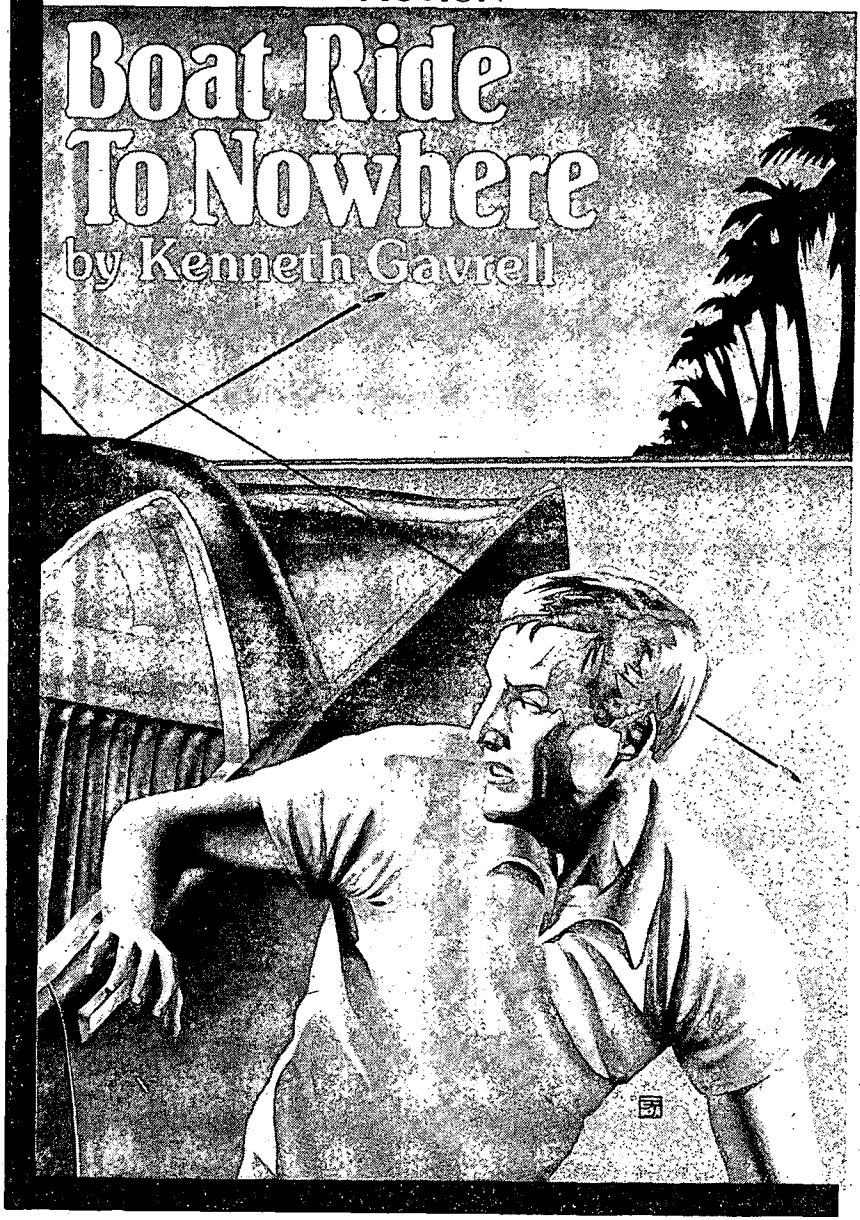


Illustration by John Jinks

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It was four o'clock on a hot Monday afternoon. San Juan was feeling tired, sweaty, and irritated. It wouldn't feel any better until it got that first evening drink and was firmly entrenched in front of the seven o'clock soap opera.

My office door buzzer rang, and I pushed the release button. She was prompt.

Mrs. Ida Accaria may once have been pretty in a heavy, obvious sort of way, but by now she looked every year of her age, which was pushing fifty. The hair was painted very black, the expensive clothes hung badly on the chunky figure, and there was no bloom in the fleshy cheeks. She walked like a man.

"Mr. Bannon?"

I said I was and shook the hand she extended. Her grip was good. "Am I late?" she asked.

"Right on time." I led her to the inner office and invited her to the chair in front of my desk. She looked a little ill at ease.

"Where do we begin?" she said as I dropped into the swivel chair behind the desk.

"I suppose where we left off on the phone. Your husband's boat—with your husband—disappeared over a week ago. The police haven't turned up a thing. What I need now is more detail."

"Victor takes out the boat every Saturday. Sometimes Sundays as well—if he's willing to forego the sports on TV. This Saturday was no different from the others."

"Does he usually go out alone?"

"I hate sailing," she said. "I hate the sun."

"Did he behave at all strangely before he left that morning?"

"I was still in bed when he left."

"Well then, the evening before?"

"I hardly saw him. I was out at the ballet with a girlfriend."

"Can I take it that you and your husband don't spend a great deal of time together, Mrs. Accaria?"

"We've been married twenty-eight years," she said, as if that constituted an answer.

I decided to be blunt: "Is it possible that your husband disappeared on purpose? I take it you're no longer very close."

"He would never do a crazy thing like that," she said. "He's already past male menopause."

Apparently bluntness didn't bother her at all.

"How old is Mr. Accaria?"

"Fifty-three. Didn't you read the newspaper stories?"

"Yes, I read them, but there was something odd about those stories, Mrs. Accaria. They were all very sketchy. Now, it's true that newspaper stories here aren't all that detailed any-

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way—we don't enjoy any New York *Times*—but these stories were full of pregnant gaps."

"There's a simple explanation for that," she said. "Victor's work. He is connected with," she paused, "a certain federal agency. The connection is now pretty tenuous; he only acts as a consultant. He formally retired at twenty years."

I asked the next obvious question: "Do you think his work might have something to do with his disappearance?"

She shrugged her mannish shoulders. "Anything is possible, I suppose."

"Your husband is Cuban, I understand."

"Yes, we came here after Castro took over."

"Judging from your accent, you're a New Yorker."

"I've lived here almost thirty years," she said. "It all started on vacation, when I met Victor." She seemed to be gazing back thirty years, to the time when she still believed in romance. I could imagine that romance inexorably turning as cold as last week's lasagna, stiffening into self pity and eventually a hard-cased selfishness, a bitchy bitterness that must have driven her husband crazy.

"Why do you want him back?" I asked.

"You're an astute psychologist, Mr. Bannon. Do you think I enjoy having no idea at all what happened to him? I have to know—I do have some normal curiosity. In addition, there's a considerable amount of property involved. And," she paused again, "if Victor's disappearance is connected with his work, I may be in some sort of danger myself. They can't be sure how much I may know."

"About what?"

"About anything."

"Did your husband confide in you about his work?"

"No, never. But *they* don't know that." She took a leather cigarette case from her purse and lit a long brown affair from a mother-of-pearl lighter. She blew out the smoke like an amateur, although she looked as if she'd been smoking for years. "The police will never find out anything. They've probably already given up."

"Well," I said, "I'll give it a try. I'll keep you informed of what, if anything, I uncover. It may cost a bit, depending on how many hours I put in."

"I don't care about the cost," she said flatly.

"As I see it, there are several possibilities," I said. "He may have had an accident and the boat was lost or sunk."

"Victor had a heart condition," she interrupted me. "He suffered a mild heart attack five years ago. But nothing since."

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"So he may very well have had an accident. It's hard to sail a cutter while you're having a heart attack. Another possibility is that he was kidnapped or—hurt by someone. A third, although you discount it, is that he purposely disappeared for some reason. And finally, the boat may have been hijacked for the drug trade. There's been a lot of that in this area recently. If that's the case, I'll probably turn up nothing at all; but it wouldn't matter because your husband would be dead."

"I *have* to know," she said. "I've brought you a good photograph of Victor and one of the boat as well."

She drew them from her purse and nudged them across the desk. The top snapshot showed a regular-featured, self-satisfied looking man in his early fifties. The hair was cut short, pretty grey. The eyes looked keen, but there was perhaps a trace of softness around the mouth. He didn't look very Latin. He was wearing a striped boating shirt and had a trim, even athletic, figure for his age.

The other photo showed a handsome all-white cutter of thirty-plus feet, with the name *Marsopa* painted proudly on her side.

"That's a pretty big boat to vanish into thin air," I commented. "Where was she docked?"

"At the Arena Blanca Yacht Harbor."

"Well, I guess that's as good a place to start as any."

The Arena Blanca Yacht Club was on the northeast edge of San Juan, a photogenic place just inside the sea entrance to a large green lagoon. A flock of expensive boats lined the long plank docks. I had to talk my way through a guard to get in. A low building close to the docks housed the office, which had a rust carpet, a couple of desks, a trophy case, and a glass and plywood counter full of marine supplies for sale. A woman behind one desk was working out accounts on a calculator. She was a full-figured blonde in her thirties, who gave me a cool once-over as I came across the carpet. *"Puedo ayudarle?"* she asked.

"Busco al propietario o administrador."

"Sr. Corretjer. Allá." She pointed through the wide glass windows at two men talking nearby on the dock. One looked like a grizzled American yachting type, the other more businesslike, with pens sticking out of his shortsleeved shirt pocket. He would be Corretjer. I thanked her and went out again.

Corretjer and the American were arguing over the gas bill for a cabin cruiser behind them.

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The American thought he'd been overcharged. Corretjer was controlling his temper admirably as he punched at figures on a pad with his forefinger. I waited till they were through, the American climbing aboard his boat looking considerably less than satisfied, and then I approached Corretjer.

He was wiping his forehead with a generous white handkerchief and muttering to himself in Spanish. He looked in his mid-thirties. My immediate impression was that Corretjer was a stereotype: the way he carried himself, the way he talked, the short black police-style mustache, the fitted shirt and the too-tight pants. He would play a noisy game of dominoes, drink too much on weekends, drive too fast, and regard women as either sexual targets or personal possessions. He'd know all the big fights of the last couple of years round-for-round, and visit his mother in the hills on Three Kings Day and Mother's Day. He'd be insecure and consider any questioning of himself or what he did as an affront to his *machismo*. These guys are more common than termites in Puerto Rico. Well, if I was right, knowing him would make it easier to deal with him.

"Sr. Corretjer?"

"Sí."

"My name is Carlos Bannon, I'm a private detective."

I extended my credentials and he studied them.

"I've been hired by Mrs. Ida Accaria to investigate her husband's disappearance."

He looked me over dubiously and handed back my credentials.

"Una cosa loca," he said. A crazy thing. "He went out a week ago Saturday and never came back."

"What do you think could have happened to him?" I asked.

He picked at something between his teeth. "Who can say? I suppose he had an accident and sank—the boat has not reappeared."

"Was he a poor sailor?"

"No, a good one."

"How was the weather that day?"

"A little misty; there was a heavy sea running."

"What else might have happened to him?"

"Boat pirates. A man alone would be an easy target."

"Did Sr. Accaria always go out alone?"

"No, recently he went out a couple of times with his wife." He smiled lewdly and made a gesture to indicate the attractiveness of Accaria's wife.

"His wife is about fifty and running to fat," I said.

"Oh."

"What did this woman look like?"

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"Maybe thirty-four or -five, but in excellent condition," he said. "Well-tuned and fast."

"Dark or light haired?"

"In between, like yours." He stuck his beefy thumbs in his beltline. "What kind of name is Carlos Bannon?"

"Half and half: my mother was *puertorriqueña,* my father *norteamericano."*

"Oh," he said again.

"Did Sr. Accaria call this woman he was with by name?"

"Not that I recall. I only saw them together a couple of times. I presumed he had a younger wife."

I sat down on a wooden pile and took out my cigarettes. I offered him one and he accepted.

"Did Sr. Accaria behave at all strangely in recent weeks?"

"Nothing I noticed—the same *hijo de puta* that he always was."

I coughed up my cigarette smoke. *"Un hijo de puta?"*

"He thought he was the most important thing on two feet. Cool, *antipatico. Un gusano."*

Apparently Corretjer shared the common island prejudice against well-off Cubans.

"Can you think of anything else that might help me learn what happened to him?"

"Who cares?" he said. "He's dead—has to be. What does it matter?"

I thanked him for his negligible help and asked where I could get a cold beer. He pointed to a restaurant that jutted out over the water beyond the office building. I walked down and ordered a bottle of Tigre and sipped it as I watched the sun throw all it had at the foliage across the lagoon before retiring for the night.

As I drove out the gate of the yacht club, a grey Honda sedan, parked in front of a *friquitín* down the road, pulled out into the traffic three cars behind me. It looked like a Honda I'd noticed in my rear view mirror on the way over, but there are a lot of grey Hondas in Puerto Rico. Anyway it made me uncomfortable enough that I shook it off before driving to a Chinese restaurant in Isla Verde for dinner.

By seven thirty I was pulling into my apartment parking lot. The yard light was on the blink again, flickering like a lovesick firefly. A radio was blaring in the second floor apartment of my noisiest neighbor. I flipped my fuel cutoff switch, climbed out, and straightened up into two loud gunshots, one of which ricocheted off the roof of my car. I went down fast. The only sounds now were the radio and my heavy breathing. The shots had seemed to come from the direction of the lot entrance.

Nobody came to investigate.

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Nowadays when people hear gunfire, they bury their heads in the nearest sand. Gunfire has become as common as shopping malls.

I edged on my hands and knees toward the parking lot entrance, always behind some car. I didn't see a damned thing, nothing out of the ordinary. A car was slowly coming down the hill. It pulled into the lot and two of my upstairs neighbors got out. As they were passing me on the way to the building, I straightened up and fell into stride beside them. They both jumped before they recognized me.

"Where the hell did you come from?" the husband said jokingly. We exchanged small talk on the way into the lobby.

It wasn't the first time someone had taken pot shots at me. I've made my share of enemies over the years as a PI.

After a shower and a drink, I phoned my friend Lieutenant Burgos in Homicide. He was off duty, so I tried his home number. His wife came on, sounding quiet and humble as she always did. She called him to the phone.

"It's been a while, Carlos. How've you been?"

"All right, except that someone took two shots at me thirty minutes ago."

"Where?"

"Downstairs in my parking lot. It may be in connection with a case I took on today. I'm investigating Victor Accaria's disappearance. His wife hired me."

"Did you see whoever it was?"

"*Nada.* I saw nothing at all. Look, Roberto, can you glance over the file on that case for me?"

"Missing Persons is handling it, not Homicide."

"I know that, but you could get a look at the file."

"I doubt if it would be worth the trouble," he said. "From what I hear, they haven't turned up a thing. But I'll check it in the morning."

"Thanks. I'll wait here for your call."

"Should be before ten," Roberto said. "Will you be up by then?"

"I'll make an effort," I said.

The phone started dancing on the hook at nine thirty. I sleepwalked over and picked it up.

"*Buenos días,*" Roberto said brightly. "Well, I've got the file right here in front of me. As I said, not much."

"Did they learn Accaria used to work for a covert federal agency—in fact, still does as a paid consultant?"

"Yeah, of course. How could they not learn that?"

"Did they learn he had a girlfriend on the side?"

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"No," Roberto said, interested. "Nothing about that here."

"Are they still working on it?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "The case is not closed." I couldn't tell if he was being ironic or not.

"Well, let me know if they happen to pick up anything important, will you?"

"I shouldn't do that," he said.

"Look, we're both working on the same case. We might as well help each other out," I said. "And I probably have more time to give to it than they have."

"And more incentive," Roberto added. "We don't get paid by the case."

He hung up and I went into the kitchen to put on the coffee.

After breakfast I went down to see if there were any spent cartridge cases near my parking lot entrance. I didn't find any. My car roof looked like hell.

When I got to the office, I found Maria and Raul with their heads together over some leads on a possible fraud case we were working on. Maria is my very efficient part-time secretary; Raul is a kid of twenty-one who runs routine records checks for me. He wants to be a PI and regards his time with me as a valuable apprenticeship. I can't pay either of them that much, but they don't put in that many hours. Raul told me what he'd turned up at Hacienda on the case, and I gave him a couple of additional checks to run. Maria said I'd gotten a call from Mrs. Accaria.

"How long ago?"

"About fifteen minutes. She said she'll be at home all morning."

I went into my own office, switched on the air conditioner, and dialed the Accaria number. It was picked up on the first ring. "Mr. Bannon?"

"Yes. I just got in."

"I suppose it's premature to ask if you have learned anything."

"Not much as yet. Tell me, Mrs. Accaria, since you and your husband more or less led your own lives, do you think it's possible that he may have had a mistress?"

"Well, he did about five years ago," she said. "I found out about it by the sheerest accident. I didn't say anything to him."

"And since then?"

"Mr. Bannon, when people are recently married, the wife will almost certainly know if her husband has something on the side. But after twenty-eight years, she's much less likely to, and much less likely to care."

"Well, could you do me a favor and go through your husband's things to see if you find anything that might suggest a

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mistress? A letter, a photo, a gift for a woman—anything at all. I'd certainly like to identify and locate this woman if she exists."

"All right," she said, "but I feel rather cheap doing it. I'll call you back later."

I thanked her and rang off. Maria came in with a cup of coffee from the electric gadget she kept on her desk. I gulped at the hot liquid and began to make a few notes on the Accaria case. Five minutes later Roberto Burgos called again.

"What's up?"

"Grab the desk firmly," he said. "They've found Accaria's boat."

"Where? When?"

"About an hour ago drifting off Hatillo. Nobody on it. The Coast Guard's bringing her in."

"I've got to look over that boat."

"I doubt the Coast Guard would allow you to. But I have nothing that absolutely needs doing this afternoon; I'll drive you out. They should have it in by two."

We agreed to meet outside my office at one thirty. I burned my gullet on some more coffee. I was surprised at how anxious I felt.

Mrs. Accaria's second call came around noon. She said that she'd been through all her husband's things like Mata Hari and she couldn't find any evidence of a girlfriend. "But I couldn't find his address book," she added. "He must have it with him."

I told her about the reappearance of the *Marsopa*.

"My God," she said. "Then Victor must be dead."

"It looks that way," I agreed. "If so, the question is: how did he die?"

Roberto was only ten minutes late. He introduced me to two other plainclothes cops in the car: Missing Persons Division. He'd already explained my interest in the case to them. As far as I could tell, they didn't seem to resent it.

The San Juan Coast Guard Station is on a point of land that juts into the bay from the old city. The cops flashed their ID's to the gate guard, and he waved us through. The *Marsopa* was already there, trussed neatly to the cement pier. Roberto went into an office to inform them of what we were about while the rest of us watched the gulls dive-bombing over the water. A few minutes later he returned with a Coast Guard type, and we all climbed aboard the boat.

"If she was drifting offshore, the Coast Guard should have found her a week ago," I said.

"That's right," Roberto agreed. "So apparently she wasn't drifting."

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"How do you figure?"

He fingered his bristly mustache, a habit he had. "Someone took the trouble to hide her, but she somehow broke loose. There are thousands of places to hide a boat along the coast where she wouldn't be seen from the air."

"If you're right, that rules out an accident." I said. "That makes it murder."

"If Accaria's really dead," Roberto said.

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't seen the body yet."

"You really don't like to take on any extra work, do you."

"As far as I'm concerned, if there's no body he's still an MP," Roberto said.

His surmises seemed to be confirmed by the *Marsopa's* broken anchor rope. Another damaged rope hung from her stern. Her sails were tied down, and her rudder had been smashed.

"There was a big storm Sunday," Roberto said, as if reading my thoughts.

In the cabin we found the radio equipment still intact, still functional. The remains of a half-eaten, fly infested ham sandwich lay on the cabin floor. In a corner lay an empty beer bottle. We could find no bloodstains or obvious signs of struggle. No evidence of gunplay. One of the MP men began dusting for prints.

I was the one who found the address book; I should have let the MP men know about it immediately, of course, but I decided to be a bad boy and said I had to go ashore to make a phone call. In the office, I did pretend to make a call (my party wasn't in) and then asked if I could use the john. They directed me to it. Inside a booth, with my adrenalin pumping full tilt, I went through that address book, page by page, as quickly as was humanly possible. There were too many female names, I'd never have time to copy them. But on one page in the A's were two phone numbers without a name at all. I didn't know anybody who wrote down phone numbers without identifying them, so I jotted the numbers on my pocket pad and left the john.

Back on the *Marsopa* I pretended to find the address book under a bunk cushion and turned it over to the Missing Persons guys. I had told them about Accaria's mysterious girlfriend on the way out, and I now asked if they'd let me know if they located her through the address book. They said they'd let Roberto know and he could give me a call.

Aside from a few good prints, we uncovered nothing else of interest. By three forty-five I was getting out of the police car in front of my office. Roberto

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waved his brown hand and they took off for headquarters in Hato Rey.

I ran for the telephone.

"Apollo Custom Tailor," said a nice woman's voice. "Can I help you?"

What the hell? I thought. I cut the line and then dialed the other number carefully. The same woman's voice answered and said the same thing.

"My name is Accaria," I said. Since she had spoken in English, I did, too. "I'm calling about my order."

Utter silence at the other end. Finally she said, "I beg your pardon, could you repeat that name, please?"

"Accaria. Victor Accaria."

Another long silence, then: "I'm sorry, but I can't find your name in our list of orders."

I wondered if she shared my own eerie feeling. "Oh, I'm sure it's there," I said. "Could I speak to the boss?"

"I'm afraid there's no one else around just now," she said. "If you could give me your number . . . "

I thought about it a second and gave her my number.

"Thank you," she said. "We'll make a thorough check and call you back."

"Yes, do that," I said.

I leafed through the yellow and the white pages of the phone book. There was no Apollo Custom Tailor listed. Well, I'd served the ball, and I'd have to wait for them to return it.

Sitting by my telephone for two hours produced nothing except anxious boredom. I chain-smoked and played with the fully loaded Browning BDA .380 in my desk. At six I gave up on them and decided to get something to eat. I strapped on the gun, shut off the air conditioner, and started for the door. That's when the phone rang. It sounded abnormally loud in the silent, shut-up office. I found myself hesitant to pick it up.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Accaria?"

"That's right."

"This is Apollo Custom Tailor," the man's voice said. "I understand you called earlier this afternoon."

"That's right."

"There seems to be some problem with your order," the man's voice said. "I'd like to talk to you about it, but not on the phone."

"You could come to my office," I suggested.

"Yes," he said. "Could we come now?"

We? I thought queasily. I fingered the butt of my Browning. "Fine," I said. "I'm at—"

"Oh, we have the address," he said. "We'll be there in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"I'll be waiting for you," I said, trying to imply a self-con-

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fidence I certainly wasn't feeling.

"Good," he said. He hung up.

Police and intelligence agencies have directories that list the addresses for all phone numbers.

I poured myself a drink from the bottle I kept in a file cabinet. It felt lonely, so I poured it a companion. Then I took the gun from my holster and laid it on the desk. Then I got a newspaper and laid it next to the gun. The silence was getting me down and I switched on the air conditioner. It was old enough to provide a lot of friendly noise.

My watch hand was just pricking six twenty when the door buzzer went off. I felt it right down my spine. I raised the newspaper as if I were reading it, with the gun hidden behind in my other hand. Then I pressed the door release.

Two men came into the outer office. One was about forty-five, with short greying hair, glasses, and a pipe. He looked like a college professor. The other was about the same age with a very white, cold looking face in which the bone structure was prominent. He would have been great for an Ingmar Bergman film. Both of them wore lightweight business suits. They crossed the outer office and entered my own while I watched them over the newspaper.

"You won't need that," the college professor said. He half smiled and blew out a little pipe smoke. It had a pleasant aroma.

The other man just regarded me stonily through blue, unblinking eyes.

"This is the first time I've been in a private detective's office, believe it or not," the college professor said.

"Have a seat," I offered. There were two empty chairs, but they seemed to prefer to stand.

"We won't be staying long, Mr. Bannon. We just wanted to warn you that you may be making a big mistake."

"How's that?"

"Investigating Victor Accaria's disappearance. We think it would be better if you stayed out of it."

"His wife has hired me. She's pretty upset."

"Naturally. But we are concerned about *you*. You may be getting into something you can't handle."

"Why don't you let me be the judge of that."

"You can't be the judge of it. You don't know enough."

"I'm all ears. By the way, is your friend a deaf-mute?"

"No, I hear all right," the pale one said. "I'd advise you to put the gun down."

"I feel better holding it, if it's all the same to you."

"Oh, what the hell," the college professor said. "Listen,

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Bannon, Victor Accaria is Cuban. He was working for us."

"I know all that."

"Well, we have reason to believe he may have been playing the game for both teams. We're not sure, but it's a good possibility. He still has relatives in Cuba. If we're right, you're involving yourself in what could be a very complicated business."

"You think the other team kidnapped or killed him?"

"He could also have defected," the blue-eyed one said expressionlessly. He looked like he'd never shown an emotion in his life.

"What it comes down to is, you want me to believe you don't know what happened to Accaria," I said.

"That's right," the college professor said. "But we'll find out."

"Maybe I can help you find out."

"We would prefer that you forget about the whole thing."

"I'll think about it," I said.

"We can have something done to assure your cooperation," Blue Eyes said.

"Oh, I'm sure. By the way, you guys haven't been following me around in a grey Honda sedan?"

"No, but maybe the other team has," the professor offered.

"Or maybe you're just imagining it," put in Blue Eyes.

"Yeah, maybe."

"Well, that's it," the professor said abruptly. "We'll be going."

They turned and filed out of my office to the outer door. The college professor was smiling around his aromatic pipe as he closed it.

I stood at a window and watched them climb into a dark blue Olds down the street. As they drove away I tried to get the plate number, but it was too far off to read. It looked like an ordinary plate.

I headed back to the file cabinet.

I was still in good health when Roberto called at noon the next day to invite me to lunch. We met at a nice open-air Italian place near my office.

"They found Accaria's girlfriend," he said. "Her name's Diana Gonzalez."

"That was fast. You guys must be getting better."

"She was about the only female in the address book who didn't have a good reason for being there," Roberto said.

"What did she have to say?"

"They're talking to her now."

"I'd like to have gone along."

"They preferred to keep it totally official. You can see her this afternoon."

He passed me a slip of paper with an address in Rio Piedras,

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the name of a pharmaceutical company in Carolina, and two phone numbers, one with an extension.

"She's at work," he said. "The packing department."

"Thanks. Did they come up with anything on the fingerprints?"

"Only two sets. One must be Accaria's; the other looks like a woman's. They're still checking them out."

"Must be Diana Gonzalez's."

He pushed back his plate of spaghetti; he'd hardly touched it.

"What's the matter?"

"The sauce is too rich for me."

We watched the traffic crawl past on Ashford Avenue. Tourists in shorts, long-haired teenagers, and one guy wearing earrings and eye liner trooped past us.

"The Condado isn't what it used to be," Roberto observed.

"You don't have to tell me that. I work here."

"Are you still with Alma?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Not like before. I haven't seen her for over a week."

"You should get married again," Roberto said. "Was the first time so bad?"

"Pretty bad."

"You never talk about it."

"Drink your beer."

"You should get married. It's not good for a man your age to be alone."

"Look," I said, "I put in my time at the front lines. Twelve years. I heard the bullets buzzing past my head and the bombs exploding. I have the scars and the jangled nerves. Send in some neophyte who doesn't know the score."

That shut him up. He played with his spaghetti. I changed the subject to my two visitors of the previous evening.

Rausch Pharmaceuticals was on a nicely landscaped piece of property near El Comandante racetrack. The building was very modern, airy. A fountain geysered at the tiled entrance; its mist prisming the afternoon sunlight. I confronted a pretty, overly madeup woman at the large reception desk and asked to speak to Diana Gonzalez in the packing department. I said I was her brother and it was an emergency. I could see she didn't buy it at all, but she got on the intercom and told Diana Gonzalez that her brother was at the front desk.

"Ella está muy popular hoy." She's a popular woman today, the receptionist remarked as she switched off the intercom.

"Oh?" I said innocently.

She studied me with unconcealed skepticism through her artificial lashes. A couple of minutes later, an attractive woman in her middle thirties appeared behind her. The

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woman walked toward us tentatively. She wasn't very tall, but her open white smock revealed a neatly proportioned figure. She had shoulder-length brown hair and dark eyes.

"Sí?" she said timidly. *"Quién es usted?"* Who are you?

I drew her a bit away from the desk. *"Mi nombre es Bannon, Srta. Gonzalez. Soy investigador."*

"Please," she said. "I've already talked to the police."

"I know. I'm working with them on the Accaria case."

"Let me see your identification."

I showed her.

"Sr. Accaria's wife has asked me to investigate his disappearance."

"I know nothing about it," she said.

"But you do know Sr. Accaria."

She opened her hands in a strange, helpless gesture, as if to say: So I'm not perfect. Is anyone perfect?

"Let's sit over there," she said, motioning towards a cement bench beyond the fountain and far from the receptionist's straining ears.

"I've told the police everything I know," Diana Gonzalez said when we'd sat down.

"Could you tell me as well?"

"Pues, bien." She seemed resigned, insecure, scared. The story she gave me wasn't very helpful. She'd been "seeing" Victor Accaria for about three months. Usually they met at her place—she had an apartment in Rio Piedras. Because he was married, they couldn't go out much; she hadn't liked that aspect of things. Victor was a loving, generous man. She'd been very alone since her divorce almost a year ago.

I asked where she'd met Accaria. At first she hesitated and then said, "At a party." For the first time I felt sure she was lying.

"Do you think Sra. Accaria suspected your relationship?" I asked.

She shook her head no. The only ones who knew about it were a couple of her girlfriends and her ex-husband, who was still jealous of her seeing another man.

"Jealous enough to kill him?" I asked. Such things were not unheard of on the island.

"Oh no, no," she said. "Don't be silly."

"Well, what do you think happened to Sr. Accaria? I suppose the police told you about finding his boat yesterday."

"Sí . . . Yo no sé." She began to cry, her head bowed, her shoulders shaking. *"Parece que Victor está muerto."* It looks as if Victor's dead.

I took out my handkerchief and offered it to her, but she shook her head and wiped her

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eyes with her slender fingertips. "I don't know what happened," she said. "He must have had an accident. I don't know."

"Do you know anyone connected with Sr. Accaria's work?" I asked. "Could it have been someone or something connected with his work?"

"Could what have been?" she asked logically.

"We can't be sure Sr. Accaria's death—if he is dead—was an accident," I said.

"I know nothing of Victor's work," she said. "He didn't talk to me about it."

"Do you think it possible that Sr. Accaria may have disappeared on purpose?"

She thought about that for a moment, then made a funny little grimace and said: "No, I don't think so. He . . . " she hesitated, "he loved me too much."

This woman seemed so vulnerable that you felt she shouldn't walk through life without an emotional bodyguard. There was an odd, distant quality about the way she spoke, not at all cool, but as though she were just the slightest bit out of synch with the reality outside her own thoughts and feelings. I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

"I'm sorry. I can't think of anything that would help you," she said.

"I want to thank you for spending the time you did with me. If something comes up, would it be all right if I called you?"

"Not here," she said quickly. "If you must call me, call me at home."

I walked her back to the reception desk at the entrance. The receptionist still regarded us with brazen curiosity.

At ten the next morning, I got a phone call at my office from Victor Accaria. When I'd recovered sufficiently, I asked him where he was calling from.

"I can't tell you that. I've called to ask you to stop investigating my so-called disappearance."

"Your wife's anxious to know what happened to you."

"She can't yet. No one can. It's a question of something —well, it's connected with my work."

"You mean they told you to 'disappear'?"

"Not exactly. I can't explain. But you may botch things up by your investigation."

"In that—"

I heard a click at the other end and then the hum of the open line. I dropped the receiver back on its cradle.

The man had spoken in Spanish in what sounded like a Cuban accent, but I didn't believe for one second he was Victor Accaria. It didn't fit. However,

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he'd been someone who knew about Victor Accaria's line of work and who knew all about my investigation.

I telephoned Missing Persons and told them about the call, and then I dialed the number of Apollo Custom Tailor. The voice that answered sounded like the same sweet woman. I told her my name and said I wanted to speak to one of the men who were kind enough to visit me Tuesday afternoon. She told me that someone would get back to me and hung up.

I sat and twiddled my thumbs. Maria came in with some routine reports for clients that she wanted me to check over.

"Take the rest of the morning off," I told her.

"Well, you're getting magnanimous."

"Is Raul supposed to come in today?"

"Not that I know of."

"Bring me a cup of your famous coffee before you go."

She went to get the coffee and I looked over the reports, signed them, and stuck them in my out box.

A few minutes after Maria had left, the telephone rang.

"Bannon speaking."

"This is one of the gentlemen who visited you Tuesday." I recognized the college professor's voice.

"I just got a call from a man who identified himself as Victor Accaria. He told me to stop investigating his disappearance. Did you guys have anything to do with that?"

He digested my news in silence. "No," he said finally, "but if we did, would we tell you?"

"Whoever made the call didn't seem to know I'd spoken to you."

"You don't think it was Accaria."

"No."

"What else did he have to say?"

"Nothing much, except that his so-called disappearance was connected with some important work he was doing."

"That's interesting. You know, Bannon, this only reinforces my contention that you'd better leave this thing alone."

"I've decided to get off it," I said and hung up.

I was lying, but I didn't think he had been. He sounded as puzzled by this latest turn of events as a guy like him was likely to sound.

I sat back and lit a Camel. After a couple of puffs, it burned down in the ashtray while my mind wandered among drifting sailboats, cloak-and-dagger spies, cheating husbands, and drug smugglers—all the routine paraphernalia of a private detective's average day. An hour later I was still sitting and still ruminating, but by then I

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thought I'd made sense out of most of the apparent contradictions. If I was right, there was one piece that would draw it all together. To find that piece I'd have to pay a visit to the Bureau of Vital Statistics at Stop 19 in Santurce.

I felt good during lunch, pretty damned pleased with myself. I telephoned Diana Gonzalez at her work from a public phone in the restaurant lobby.

"I asked that you not call me here," she said as soon as I identified myself.

"I know, but I thought you'd want to hear that I've learned what happened to Victor Accaria. I'm going to my office to get something I left there and then I'm going to the police with my information."

"What happened to Victor?" she asked.

"He was murdered," I said. "Shot."

I heard her catch her breath as I hung up the receiver.

My dialing finger was getting tired, but there was one more call to be made. This time I caught Roberto Burgos in his office.

"Remember those man's prints they found in the *Marsopa?*" he said. "Well, one of them turned out not to match the rest. It's a good print, too. They're checking on it now."

"I can't say I'm surprised. Listen, Roberto. I had a hunch and it's paid off in spades. There isn't much time, so listen hard."

It would need maybe twenty minutes or so. I drove around and admired the sunny afternoon for a while before heading for my office. There was nobody hiding in the bushes. I let myself in, left the street door closed but unlocked, and the inner door to my personal office open. I sat at the desk, removed my holstered Browning, and stuck the gun in my right sock and the holster in the desk drawer. Then I flicked on the tape recorder hidden under some papers in my wastebasket.

A couple of minutes later, the front door swung back slowly and Angel Corretjer, the manager of the Arena Blanca Yacht Club, entered the outer office. He saw me and walked to the second doorway, where he pulled a snub-nosed revolver from his pants pocket and trained it on me.

"Have you found what you were looking for?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"The record of your marriage to Diana Gonzalez Maldonado three years ago."

He looked confused, but what did it matter. The important thing was to get him talking.

"When did she find out that

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you'd killed Accaria?" I asked.

"She guessed it at once. I had warned her several times to stop seeing him."

"Does she know you're here?"

"No. I just told her to keep me informed of *anything* she heard from you or the police." He smirked evilly. "She's been cooperative."

"For a while I was thrown off by the fact that you volunteered the information about Accaria's girlfriend," I said. "But a guy like you *would*, out of sheer bravado. Perverse self-confidence in your perfect crime. And you figured that if I did locate Accaria's girlfriend, then you'd have a way to keep tabs on my investigation. You've got that woman so scared she can hardly think."

"I told her that what I did to her *amante* I could do to her."

"She's not your wife any more."

"As far as I'm concerned, she is. I didn't want the divorce. She claimed I treated her badly, kept her locked in the house, that I was insanely jealous."

"All of which sounds plausible enough to me," I commented.

"A man's wife is his property. She shouldn't be out of the house alone." His revolver was trembling slightly. "I taught her a wife's place."

"You guys always have a gun around," I said. "It's handy to terrorize your wives and girlfriends, and it helps relieve your insecurities."

"Cállate!" he shouted. I saw his tense, sweaty finger tighten across the trigger.

"Don't you want to know how I put it together?" I asked quickly.

"Sí," he said. "I am surprised at that."

"Well, let's look at what happened. I go to see you about Accaria's disappearance and shortly afterwards someone takes two shots at me in the parking lot. I go to interview Diana Gonzalez and the next thing I know I get a call from 'Victor Accaria' telling me to lay off the investigation. Did you really think I'd swallow that phone call?

"Then there was the odd, scared manner of your ex-wife. Too scared. I couldn't figure out why. There was also her overly rapid dismissal of any notion that her former husband might be involved in Accaria's disappearance. I've lived on this island over forty years, and I knew the idea wasn't at all farfetched.

"Finally, whoever called me pretending to be Accaria had to know something about the nature of his work. I didn't think the intelligence boys had made the call—it didn't fit, and anyway it's not their style. That meant it probably had to be

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someone connected with Accaria's wife or his girlfriend. The wife had hired me to find him—she seemed to be on the up-and-up and I hadn't caught her in any lies. But Diana Gonzalez had lied when I asked her where she met Victor Accaria. That seemed a meaningless kind of lie, but somehow it had to be important. Its importance was, of course, that she'd met him at the Arena Blanca Yacht Club. If she'd told me that, I might have—let's be generous and say I would have—made the connection with you."

"You're a good detective, Bannon. It's a shame you won't be using your talents any more."

"You were too damned cocky from the start," I said.

"No, it's you who were too cocky, as this gun proves."

"I suppose you keep it in an ankle holster."

"Right again. How did you know?"

"Your type always keeps it in an ankle holster, so you can cross your legs and show everybody your piece."

"You've done enough talking," Corretjer said. He leveled the pistol.

"Just one more thing," I said. "You followed Accaria out with your boat and shot him. What did you do with his body?"

"It's a mile offshore, wearing lead necklaces. They'll never find it."

"Why did you bother to hide his boat?"

"To confuse things. It broke loose during a storm."

"You should have sunk it," I said. "You know, if the police put things together as I have, your ex-wife will crack like an eggshell—she'll tell them everything."

"I'm not worried about the police 'putting things together,' " he said. "They're not all that bright."

"Tell them yourself," I said. "Come in, Roberto!"

The front door banged back, and Corretjer wheeled. Five men crowded in with weapons drawn: Roberto, the two MP men, and two uniforms. Corretjer froze. I had my Browning pointed at his back.

"Drop it," I snarled.

He opened his hand and the revolver clunked to the floor. He raised his arms slowly, accompanying the action with a string of obscenities.

That's when I told him about the tape recorder.

I saw Mrs. Accaria late that afternoon. She took it well and complimented me on solving the case so quickly. I told her I'd send her a bill in the mail.

I never did learn if Victor Accaria had been playing for both teams.

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Death of a Dieter

by Colleen Kobe

Her nervousness affected Ellen worst in her stomach, but she held it in as best she could. The fifteen-year-old, delicate-featured black woman clasped her hands firmly in her lap in an attempt to calm herself.

She sat in a small room, about the size of a bedroom, that was completely unfurnished for the occasion save for the chair upon which she sat, the plain wooden table before her, and the folding chair on the opposite side of the table. Upon the table squatted a cathode ray tube computer terminal, whose screen at the moment was blank. The only window in the uncarpeted room was off to Ellen's left, leaving the screen in shadow. Late morning winter sun streamed nakedly into the room, without benefit of softening by a lacy curtain or two.

She drew a deep breath, as Louisa had shown her, checked her watch once more, and, as she slowly expelled it, typed into the terminal, "I'm ready."

Illustration by Ron Chironna

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After a moment, the screen filled with a not-unpleasant array of amber-on-black paragraphs. She knew by heart already what they said, but she read again the paragraphs of the final test.

You're a finalist in the competition to become a member of the Mystery-Solver's Club of Earth (it read). *Congratulations for getting this far!*

You are now about to solve the last mystery we have so cleverly arranged for you. To refresh your memory, here are the ground rules.

1. You will receive a brief description of the (possible) crime or event and a list of the persons involved. Your task (should you decide to accept it) is to determine if a crime has been committed, and if so, by whom and why.

2. You may interview any of the persons involved with the case as many times as you like.

3. You may perform your task in any legal fashion you like.

4. You may ask once, and only once, if you have enough information to solve your task. We will answer either "yes" or "no." Subsequent questions will be ignored.

5. When you feel you have accomplished your task, enter your reasoning into this terminal; your statements will be immediately transmitted to us.

a. If your conclusions are incorrect, you may reapply for membership at any time.

b. If your conclusions are correct, you will become a member of the MSCE.

6. You may not leave the room until one of these conditions is fulfilled:

a. You have accomplished your task.

b. You feel you cannot accomplish your task.

c. The four-hour time limit, begun the moment you request the case history, has been exceeded.

7. Failure to follow these rules will result in immediate disqualification and a suspension of the privilege of joining the MSCE for a period of ten years.

Press any key to produce the case history.

Ellen breathed deeply again. It's now or never, she thought. Maybe I should just go home. I can always try again later. Then

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again, if I make it I *will* become a member and then that stupid Simon Parker will have to pay up. He'll *have* to. Louisa saw us shake hands, and she'll tell his mama if he doesn't. What I could do with twenty dollars—

With a short, almost spastic flick of her finger, she hit the space bar. The screen cleared instantly. She checked her watch: nine fifteen on the nose. She had until one fifteen to solve the case—if there was anything to solve.

The screen filled again with amber words. She made herself review them carefully.

Susan Hartshaw, a wealthy twenty-four-year-old woman, died of malnutrition today. She had been riding a tandem side-by-side bicycle with her husband when she collapsed. The medical examiner's report says that she weighed seventy-four pounds when she died, and that her death was primarily due to starvation.

The people involved with the case are:

a. Bradley Hartshaw, Susan's husband
b. Amanda Cathcart, Susan's best friend
c. Louetta Hartshaw, Susan and Bradley's daughter
d. Christopher Hartshaw, Bradley's son from a previous marriage
e. Wilbur Succint, Susan's lawyer.

Susan read and reread the screen. The cursor blinked impatiently as she typed, "Please send in Bradley Hartshaw."

Into the room strode a tall, swarthy man, about thirty years old. His olive-colored skin contrasted neatly with his black hair and eyes; his belly threatened to explode from beneath his tight, but fashionable, sweat suit. At the moment his features were contorted in grief: his lips were pressed firmly together, his eyes avoided her gaze. He slumped into the folding chair.

Not quite sure where to begin, Ellen faltered. "Mr. Hartshaw?" she said tentatively. "I'm very sorry about your wife's death."

He shrugged listlessly. "Can't change anything now." He seemed to gather courage: he lifted his head and tried to smile, but it quickly faded into a grimace. He looked away. Ellen marveled at the man's acting.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'll have to ask you a few questions." Again he shrugged. "How long were you two married?"

"Only two glorious years."

"Any children?"

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"One, Louetta, a little over a year old." He smiled.

"I, uh, understand that your wife died of starvation." Instantly the smile vanished. "Was she always so thin?"

Bradley stared at his toes. "No," he said, looking at her for the first time. "That started after Louetta was born. When we got married, she was a little on the plump side. She's five f— she *was* five feet four and then weighed around one thirty-five. And when she was pregnant with Louetta, she gained about thirty pounds more. But after Louetta was born, the extra weight really started bothering her, so she started to diet. And exercise. Unbeatable combination."

"What kind of exercise did she do, Mr. Hartshaw?"

"Just call me Bradley, honey. Exercise? Name it. Swimming, running, golf, racquetball . . . " He snorted. "I saw this coming, you know," he admitted confidentially.

That startled Ellen. "You did?"

He nodded wisely. "Yeah. I've seen pictures of those people with that disorder. Anorexia nervosa, that's what it's called, right? Arms and legs like sticks, chests like a washboard. Horrible. Hard to understand why being cool means looking like that." He shook his head, looking away.

Suddenly he rose and paced the floor. "But what are you supposed to do? You can't make them eat 'cause they'll just run to the bathroom and waggle their fingers in their throats and get rid of it. Even Chris saw this coming. Just what are you supposed to *do?*" he ended in a wail.

Ellen hastily consulted her terminal. "Chris is your son, is that right?"

"Yeah."

"How old is he?"

"Thirteen. He's the only good thing my lousy ex-wife left me. Geez. Never get married if you ain't in your twenties yet. It'll never work. Unless you're both masochists."

"How long have you been divorced?"

"Ten years now." He stopped pacing, staring out the window. "Listen, if you don't mind, is that all?"

"One more thing, Mr. Har— Bradley. What do you do for a living?"

He hesitated, smiling crookedly. "I used to be a plumber. Would you believe it? But three years ago, when I turned twenty-eight, I thought to myself, 'Sure, the money's good. But do I want to do this alone, forever?' so that was when I started going out to meet

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people, and that was when I met Susan . . . Yeah, I met Susan . . . Excuse me." He rubbed his forehead and hurried out of the room.

Ellen glanced at her watch. Nine forty-five. What a quick half hour! She consulted the list of persons and typed into the terminal, "Please send in Amanda Cathcart."

She waited, gazing around the room. Am I doing this right? she wondered. These people—these actors—are very good at this. Surely they wouldn't divulge information freely. I'll have to ask the right person the right question. I wonder how I'll know if I have enough information to make an intelligent decision?

The door opened and a slightly chunky woman walked straight to Ellen, her sneakered feet squeaking loudly on the wooden floor. The expression on her bland face was one of grim determination.

"Ellen?" Amanda snapped briskly, her hand outstretched for Ellen to shake. "I'm Amanda Cathcart. I was Susan's best friend. There was nothing we didn't tell each other. And I want you to know that I think poor, poor Susan was murdered!"

Ellen, taken aback, said soothingly, "Won't you sit down, Ms. Cathcart? Now then, permit me to ask you a few questions, may I? First, how old are you?"

The woman sniffed. "Twenty-four."

"And how long have you known Susan?"

"We've been best friends since grade school. Went to all the parties and other social events together. Everyone always called us Susanda when they wanted both of us." She smiled at the memory.

"So you two were virtually sisters, is that right?"

"Yes."

"Did you share everything?"

"Well, just the things we wanted to share."

"Who do you think killed Susan, and why?"

"It was that no-good husband of hers. Bradley. And as to why—well, look." She tapped a dirty fingernail nervously on Ellen's table as she collected her thoughts. "You know Susan was left with all her parents' money when they were killed?"

"No," said Ellen curiously. "I didn't know they were."

"They died three years ago in a typical car crash. Drunk driving other car, one-way street, head-on collision, everyone dies but the drunk. Nothing anybody could do. So they left all their *substantial* estate to only child Susan, who could easily live on it the rest of her life. At first she moped around all the time, didn't want to do

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anything, bawled a lot, you know, just generally mourning. Finally I got tired of it and got it into her head that all the grieving in the world wasn't going to bring her parents back. After a while she realized I was right. So she—and I, too, occasionally—started going out to bars and things, to meet some nice guys. After all, she might as well be happy, right?

"Well, not long after that both *my* parents died, also in a wreck involving a drunk driver." Amanda stopped to catch her breath. "The different thing was, my parents were up to the wazoo in debt, and by the time all the bills were paid off there wasn't anything left for yours truly. Ahh, well. Who wants to be rich anyway.

"So now I'm going to Tech to become a mechanical engineer. Doesn't seem like I have the brain for it, does it? But the tests say I do, so I will. Can't stand law, or business, or cutting people up, so what else is there?

"And I started going out with Susan to the bars. And we met guys. And not too long after that, Susan started getting nervous."

"Nervous?" interrupted Ellen.

"Yeah. I mean, how was she to know whether the guy liked her for her money or for herself? How did she know what they *really* wanted, you know? She got a little scared, and only went out with me once in a while. And so she wasn't around when I met Bradley Hartshaw."

"Bradley? You mean her husband?" Ellen exclaimed without thinking.

Amanda glared at her. "Yeah. Her husband, that skunk. Anyway, we went out for a while. 'Cept . . . I don't know. I was head-over-heels for that jerk. Crap." She inspected her fingernails closely. Ellen remained silent.

"So, yeah, we went out a year together. Then I noticed he wasn't coming around so much, and then one day I stopped over at Susan's and his car was in her driveway and there they were on the sofa in the living room going at it. So I rapped on the window and flipped them both the bird and took off. I had to study that night anyhow. Exams.

"Didn't see either of them for a week. Finally Susan came over looking guilty as hell and told me they were going to get married. Married!" She paused again. "It was a long time, about a year, just before she had the baby, that we got to be good friends again. Not quite like it used to be, but good." She smiled. "I was there when Louetta was born."

Ellen cleared her throat. "You mentioned that you were in bad

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shape financially. Why didn't you ask Susan to lend you some? It sounds as if she had more than enough."

Amanda smirked. "I was too proud. She offered over and over again. But I never took any. Funny, huh? But the more engineering I learned, the better I felt about myself. Like, I used to tell myself that sure, maybe Susan had a lot more money than me, but she never did anything to get it except get born. Big deal. But me—I'm earning my Suzybucks. Or I will, this May, when I graduate."

"But why do you think he killed her?" persisted Ellen.

Exasperated, Amanda cried, "Because he's a jerk, that's why! He's a sneak and a greedy lout, and he's smart. He'll have thought out a way to get all her money, don't you worry."

Disappointment creeping in, Ellen asked, "But you have no idea how, no concrete proof . . . "

Amanda grinned maliciously. "That's for *you* to find out, my dear." And she rose and left the room, the door slamming loudly behind her.

Irritated at the woman's abrupt exit, Ellen scowled at the closed door. Remembering her deadline, she looked at her watch again. Ten thirty. She consulted her list and typed into the terminal, "Please send in Christopher Hartshaw."

What should I ask him? she wondered, rising to stretch her muscles a bit. Bradley says he's—what?—thirteen? She swung her arms in wide circles, her hands occasionally breaking the shaft of sunlight streaming through the window. How much does a thirteen-year-old notice?

Presently there was a knock on the door. "Come in." A small, muscular boy with Bradley Hartshaw's black hair and eyes, but with lighter skin, entered and, while smiling politely at Ellen, seated himself. She followed, astounded at how old the boy looked for his age.

"I'm Ellen," she said, extending her hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Ellen. I'm Christopher," replied the boy. His grip was warm and clammy.

"How old are you, Christopher?"

"I'll be fourteen in January."

She shook her head disbelievingly. "My gosh, you look big for your age. I would swear you look fifteen at the least."

He smiled at what he took to be a compliment. "I lift weights," he said smugly, as if that were all he needed to say.

"So, tell me. How did you and your stepmother get along?"

The cool demeanor flickered for an instant. "Susan and I got

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along very well. We hardly ever saw each other."

"Does that mean when you did see each other there were personality conflicts?"

He winced. "If you mean did we fight, the answer is yes. She always wanted me to bring other kids home to play with, as if I were a little child. Honestly. Anybody can see that *I* am no little kid. I'm almost fourteen. I don't play those kid games any more."

"You don't? Then what do you do?"

"I do adult, mature things."

"Like what?"

"Well . . . downhill ski, for one thing. And lift weights. And play racquetball, if I can find a partner of my caliber. And watch sports on TV. The Lions did pretty well this year."

Ellen realized they were off the track. "So you and your mother got along fairly well. How about your father?"

"If you mean my *step*mother," snapped Christopher testily, "I guess so. My father and I get along okay, though we do occasionally have a difference of opinion. But who doesn't?"

"What did you do when your *step*mother started getting thinner?"

"Nothing. Was I supposed to do something?"

Ellen decided she didn't like this kid. "Your dad mentioned you saw this coming, the starvation that caused her death."

"Of course. It was all the doing of that wench Amanda Cathcart."

"What?"

He shook his head pityingly. "Of course it was. A child could see it. She was still jealous of Susan's taking Father away from her, so she encouraged Susan to lose weight. And lose it. And lose it. Finally, you know, she died."

Confused, Ellen asked, "But how could Amanda persuade Susan to lose weight? Why should Susan have listened?"

"Because she felt guilty for taking Father away from her best friend in the world. Guilt makes people do strange things sometimes," he added airily, flexing a bicep admiringly.

Ellen sat back and thought for a moment, "What do you think of your half-sister Louetta?"

He snorted. "Oh, she's still such a child. We don't have a lot to talk about."

"Talk about? She's a year-old *baby,* Christopher! What do you mean you don't have a lot to talk about?"

Christopher, missing the slur, merely rolled his eyes heavenward. "May I leave now? I have a set of weights that I have to return to the store. They don't weigh in right."

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Disgusted, Ellen waved him away. He left. She glanced at her watch: eleven o'clock.

Two people remained on the list that she hadn't seen yet. Louetta seemed unlikely to shed much light on the matter, but then you never knew. Ellen's black hands typed, "Please send in Bradley and Louetta Hartshaw."

In a moment the dark man sat before her, an unhappy baby in his arms. The baby had her father's olive skin, but her hair was probably her mother's color. She was cranky about something: her little mouth twisted into a scowl and her eyebrows nearly touched, despite Bradley's desperate cooing.

"Aww, isn't she a dumpling?" Ellen marveled for Bradley's sake. He half-smiled, his attention still on Louetta. "May I hold her?"

He looked uneasily at her before he agreed. Gently they transferred the now-wailing infant to Ellen's arms. "Shh," she murmured, remembering all the tricks babysitting had taught her. Before long the child slept peacefully.

"Hey, that's pretty good," exclaimed Bradley softly.

Ellen examined Louetta's unblemished skin. No bruises, or makeup imitating them, so it was unlikely Bradley was supposed to be a child-beater. More likely a neglecter. "What are your plans concerning Louetta?"

"Uh . . . I don't follow you."

"Are you planning to hire a nursemaid, or governess, or whatever they're called?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Susan's death, you know . . . she always used to take care of Louetta . . ." His voice trailed off. Ellen's lips hardened.

"Tell me, why did you break up with Amanda Cathcart?" she asked innocently.

Immediately a suspicious, guarded look stamped itself on Bradley's face. Then he shrugged. "I didn't love her any more, I guess. It was gone. And Susan, my Susan, was so pretty, just like a dream. I can hardly believe she's gone." He gulped loudly.

Oh, brother, thought Ellen. "Christopher seems to have a definite idea about who killed her."

He perked up. "Who?"

She watched him carefully. "Amanda. For revenge."

He stared at her, then slowly nodded. "It all fits. The rejected lover, the betrayed best friend. She was both. Hey, you know, that's one of the reasons I stopped going out with her. Once her mind was made up, that was it. Totally inflexible. That wench." He scowled

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blackly. "I hope you can get evidence to prove it."

"So do I, Bradley. Would you mind taking Louetta? I believe I'd like to think for a while." He dutifully retrieved the baby and headed toward the door. "Just a moment, Bradley," she called.

He stiffened and then turned, a pleasant smile on his face. "Yes?"

"Whose idea was the tandem side-by-side?"

He relaxed. "Oh, mine. I wanted to go with her when she was out exercising. Seemed like we were never together. I guess . . . I guess that's how it'll always be now . . . " A sob caught in his throat, and he left.

Ellen stared at the ceiling. Eleven thirty. An hour and forty-five minutes. She wished Louisa were here. Louisa could do anything, just about. Well, maybe her legs weren't so good any more, but she could get along fine in her wheelchair. She sure was smart. Ellen tried to remember what Louisa had told her.

"Now you relax, young lady," she could almost hear the woman saying in her cracked, aging voice. "You're all tensed up, ain't no way your brain's gonna work right. But don't you turn into no sloth, neither. Relax them shoulders! Stand up once in a while—don't let that seat fall asleep!"

What else had she said? thought Ellen, pacing the room slowly, swinging her arms. Oh, yeah. "Ever'body runs by their own set of rules. Only a few people can see beyond the end of their nose." That was *not* Christopher, Ellen grimaced. What a lost cause.

"Afore you tackle the problem," continued the old woman's voice in Ellen's memory, "make sure you got all the information. A picture puzzle ain't nothing without all the pieces. Don't even try to put it together without knowing everything."

Ellen halted. *Did* she know everything she needed to solve the case? No. There was somebody else on the list she hadn't thought about. She crossed back to her table. "Please send in Wilbur Succint."

An old man came in, stooped over with age. "Mr. Succint?" Ellen asked, holding out her hand as she went to greet him. He ignored her and hobbled over to sit down wearily. She crossed back to her own chair, miffed about the handshake. The gentleman's white hair and weathered skin, together with his obviously painful back, gave Ellen the impression he ought to have retired years ago. "Mr. Succint, I'm Ellen, and I'd like to ask—"

"What?" shouted Wilbur, cupping a hand to his ear. "Say, I'm Wilbur Succint. Hope you don't mind me not shaking hands, but they shake fine by themselves." He laughed cheerfully at his own

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humor, despite the dark side of it. "Besides, the arthritis is hell today. Damned winter."

Relieved that he hadn't meant to hurt her, Ellen relaxed. "You're Susan Hartshaw's lawyer, aren't y—"

"What?"

Feeling uncomfortable at shouting at the old man, Ellen tried again. "You're Susan Hartshaw's lawyer, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes I am. And her parents' before that."

"Could you please tell me who benefits from her death?"

"Well, I don't suppose it's any secret now, if it ever was. Let's see . . . " He fumbled in his suitcoat's inner pockets and produced a folded piece of paper in his gnarled, wrinkled hands. Carefully, trembling a bit, he unfolded it. "This is a copy of the will she made last week," he explained. "It's slightly different from the one she and What's-his-name made when the baby was born. Don't even know if he knows about it."

"Did you say last *week?*"

"What's the matter, hard of hearing? Welcome to the club!" Wilbur laughed easily again. Ellen found herself smiling with him. "Yes, yes, last Wednes—no, must have been Thursday, stopped at the grocer's that afternoon. So Thursday. And here it says . . . " He straightened the trifocals perched precariously on his nose. "Ahhh . . . she left half her estate—that's *after* taxes, of course—to her husband Bradley. Then an eighth each to Christopher and Louetta, not to be given to them till their thirtieth birthdays." He peered over his glasses at her. "Got that one from Ann Landers. Didn't want easy money at an early age to spoil 'em, she said. Smart woman." He returned to the paper. "Then a quarter is to go to her dear childhood friend Amanda Cathcart." Satisfied, he turned back to Ellen.

"What makes this will different from the one she and Bradley made?"

"Why, the amount left to Amanda. There wasn't any before."

"Oh. Well, thank y—"

"What?"

"Thank you, Mr. Succint!" The old man smiled and hobbled out.

Now where am I? thought Ellen. It's noon, *everybody* has a motive (inheritance), and I'm frankly not even sure there's been murder here. Louisa, help me!

But Louisa wasn't there.

Ellen was.

And if Ellen was going to get her twenty dollars from stinky

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Simon Parker—and *not* hear about it the rest of forever—she had better get thinking. *Now.*

She had seventy minutes.

Ellen chewed her fingernails nervously. Now, do I have all the facts? I could ask, but only once. What if I don't? What if I haven't asked the right questions? What if someone has *lied* to me? What if—

Oh, what if, what if. Ellen smacked the table with her palm. I have to know.

"Have I all the clues necessary to solve this case?" she typed fearfully.

After a million-year wait, the one-word reply came back. *Yes.*

Yes, puzzled Ellen. I have all the pieces. I can now solve it myself.

For nearly an hour she paced the darkening room, testing theories, remembering statements, tones of voice, gestures, anything that seemed significant. Several times she grew excited with her own ideas, but each time she was forced to reject them.

Make the *theory* fit the *facts*. Make the *theory* fit the *facts*, she repeated to herself. Finally she typed, "Please send in Christopher Hartshaw."

The boy walked insolently into the room. "Well, what else do you want me to explain to you?"

Gritting her teeth, Ellen said, "You mentioned you lift weights." He nodded. "But you have problems with some of them." Again he nodded. "What were they?"

"Aww—the weights would say something like fourteen point three pounds, but it wasn't really, it was more like forty."

Her heart pounding, Ellen asked, "And how did you know that?"

With exaggerated patience, Christopher answered slowly. "I picked up the dumbbell and weighed myself. Then I put it down and weighed myself. Then I subtracted the smaller number from the bigger number. And the dumbbell weighed what was left. Remember second grade?"

"Where was the scale you used?"

"Where are most scales in houses, El—"

"Where was the scale you used?"

"In the bathroom, of course."

Ellen felt like singing. "That's enough Christopher. You may leave." Clearly he didn't care much for the dismissal, but Ellen didn't notice as she typed furiously into the terminal. At one twelve, when she was through, she critically reviewed her work.

"Was Susan Hartshaw murdered? Yes," she read.

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"By whom? Her husband, Bradley Hartshaw.

"How and why? He wanted money, but he didn't want to work for it. The easiest method, therefore, was to marry it. That's why he courted Amanda, who, although she no longer had money of her own, knew someone who did. Someone available, someone who wouldn't be nervous around a near-sister's boyfriend, someone almost asking to be married.

"So Bradley Hartshaw got to know Amanda, who loved him truly, with all her heart. Then he gradually moved into Susan's territory, winning her over eventually but leaving a scalded Amanda behind. Unconcerned, he married Susan and together they had a child.

"At that point, he decided he was tiring of Susan and her worries and he'd like to be rid of her. So he took advantage of her desire to trim down and encouraged her. With the popularity of the disorder known as 'anorexia nervosa' he was able to pretend that Susan had developed it, to her friends (even though she had none of the preceding symptoms). He vigorously supported her exercise and dieting, for in fact wasn't she walking right into his trap?

"Despite all her fasting and sweating, however, she didn't think she was losing weight very fast. But she was. She never knew exactly how much she weighed—because *Bradley kept misadjusting the bathroom scale.* When she really weighed one hundred thirty pounds, the scale said one forty-one. And so on. So when she died at seventy-four pounds, the scale only read one hundred—which was probably her goal.

"Bradley could possibly have gotten away with it if his son, who took it upon himself to play the role of the idle rich kid, hadn't checked the weights of his dumbbells on the same scale Susan used.

"Is this reasoning correct?"

Ellen waited tensely for the answer. Her time had run out. She fidgeted in her chair, her tushie fallen asleep. Simon Parker's unwelcome mug intruded upon her thoughts, and she pushed it away disdainfully. She thought about what she could do with twenty dollars, and what it would be like without twenty dollars . . . and what it could be like to be a member of a club of people who liked to solve mysteries, too. . . . Lost in a daydream, she suddenly noticed the return message that cleared the screen.

Yes.

Ellen was just beginning to break into a wide grin when a second message appeared below that.

Welcome to the club, Ellen.

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The Case of the Unloved Evidence

by James A. Noble

Illustration by Lisa Knouse

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When Captain John Evert began requesting more than the usual amount of reports and information on the death of George Lightner, Detective Sergeant Mark Murphy knew he was up to something. He figured he was going to find out what it was when the captain asked to see him. Mark limped into his office and collapsed in one of the chairs along the side wall.

"What happened to you?" asked the captain.

"Judo demonstration."

"You don't know judo."

"I know. Janet Huddle and Martha Smith are both members of the Lakemar Judo Club. I went over there this morning to question them. Well, one thing led to another, and the next thing I knew, Miss Huddle asked me to play the role of a mugger so she could show off a new throw she had learned. Something called a Hanemik . . . or Hanemok . . . whatever. Heck of a throw. I saw my entire life pass before me when I hit the floor."

"You probably mean a Hanemakikomi," said the captain, grinning. "It's Japanese for 'spring winding throw.' So you're still working on the George Lightner case. Right?"

Uh-oh, thought Mark. Here it comes. "Of course. You know that."

"Well, you won't have to worry about doing any more hazardous interviews. I'm taking you off the case."

"How come?"

"Because it's been solved."

"By whom?"

Captain Evert leaned back in his chair and assumed a smug expression. "By me."

"What!" Mark laughed loudly and slapped his knee. He grimaced in pain when the injured right leg protested.

"Serves you right. You forget I was once the best detective this precinct ever had. Would you like a little history lesson?"

"I'll settle for your solution to the Lightner case," said Mark, having recovered.

Captain Evert gestured toward a file lying in the center of his desk. "I've reviewed all the evidence and testimony involved. Now, I know you're already aware of most of the facts, but let me summarize the events leading up to my conclusion in this case.

"As you know, some ladies in the Lakemar community formed a group to help reduce the crime in their area by creating neighborhood watches, forming nightly patrols, and holding meetings to advise the people on safeguarding their property. They call themselves, appropriately enough, the Lakemar Ladies Anti-Crime Association. At first, everything went smoothly. More recently, the

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group has been enjoying a rather dubious relationship with this department."

"Dubious is hardly the word for it," said Mark.

"You've got to understand them. They simply have a little trouble distinguishing between reporting crimes to the police and taking excessive action against criminals themselves."

"You mean like the time they caught that cat burglar and stuck his head in a kiddie pool until he confessed to a whole string of robberies. They ended up throwing the whole case out of court and letting the guy off scot-free.

"Or how about the time they set up one of their members to act as a decoy to entrap a purse snatcher and put that purse on the ground next to her at the bus stop. The fifty pound lead weight in it broke the snatcher's arm in two places."

"Don't forget," Captain Evert reminded him, shaking his finger. "They also caught two burglars, four purse snatchers, two car thieves, and a flasher."

Mark laughed. "They didn't report the flasher for nearly two hours . . . and they also caught a few innocent types: two electric company meter readers, a telephone repairman, an exterminator, and a newspaper boy. I won't even mention the fact that there's been a rash of burglaries in Lakemar recently, in spite of their efforts."

"You can hardly expect the Lakemar ladies to do the whole job perfectly. Whoever's been breaking into those homes is a real pro. He's only been spotted one time, and we don't have much of a description; just a man wearing a dark sweater and slacks. He's never left fingerprints and takes only valuable items that can be easily fenced. If this department can't even get a line on the thief, we can hardly expect their association to have much better luck. Let's not forget, their actions have taken a lot of criminals off the street and reduced the number of patrols we've had to send out there."

"Do you feel they had some responsibility in the death of George Lightner?" asked Mark.

"Not as a group," responded Evert. "As we know, the death of George Lightner was no accident, it was murder. I have compiled evidence that positively proves who killed Lightner and why."

"Mrs. Hannah Lightner, I'll bet," guessed Mark.

"That's right," said the captain. "The founder and president of the association . . . and unfortunately the wife of the deceased. How did you know that?"

Mark ignored the question. "So I suppose you think George

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Lightner was a criminal and his wife killed him because she's an anti-crime fanatic."

"Of course not," sighed Captain Evert. "Spare me your sarcasm. George Lightner convinced his wife to form the anti-crime club so he could keep her busy while he was seeing another woman."

"You can prove he was seeing another woman?"

"Well, no . . . but Hannah thought so, according to the other members of the association, and it made her furious. She was even heard to say she would kill him if she ever caught him at it."

"I wrote the interrogation reports you read," said Mark. "I know all that."

"Did you also know that George Lightner had a big fat life insurance policy?"

Mark merely sighed. "So you figured that was the motive?"

"Correct. Jealousy and money; powerful stuff." Captain Evert rose from his chair and walked slowly around to the front of his desk. It was obvious he was about to deliver the coup de grâce to Mrs. Lightner.

"So I have the motive," he said, sitting on the edge of the desk. "That leaves me with opportunity and hard evidence. When I was a detective about your age, that's what I would go for. Motive, opportunity, and evidence. Yessir."

"Wow," said Mark facetiously. "The MOE technique."

"All right, wise guy. Listen to this. Every Saturday the Lakemar Ladies Anti-Crime Association meets to pass out the schedules for who will be patrolling which streets for the following week. All the members have citizens band radios in their cars to keep in touch with one another. Now, there aren't enough members to cover the entire neighborhood, so some areas aren't patrolled every week. Guess who sets up the schedules?"

"Mrs. Lightner."

"Now you're following me. And guess who helps her with the schedules?"

"Mr. Lightner."

"Right again. You get it? George Lightner knows exactly where the ladies will be patrolling, so he knows when it's safe to pay a little visit to his mistress without being spotted."

"Oh, yeah," said Mark. "The unidentified mistress."

"Don't worry. I'm fairly certain it's Miss Huddle. Anyway, on the night of the murder, only two members were out cruising the streets: Hannah Lightner and Edith Jackson. The two other members were not patrolling that night. Janet Huddle, the only single woman in the organization, who claimed she was home nursing a headache, and Martha Smith, who

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had tickets to see a movie starring some big judo expert. According to her husband, she really eats that sort of thing up. The movie was a disappointment, however, so Mrs. Smith left early and drove over to see if Janet Huddle was feeling any better. A short distance from Huddle's house she spotted a suspicious character in a dark sweater and slacks creeping around a bunch of houses, so she radioed the two members who were patrolling. Right away Hannah Lightner calls her back and tells her to stay in her car and keep an eye on the man until she and Mrs. Jackson converge on the scene.

"After a while, Mrs. Smith lost sight of the suspicious character. A few minutes later, she saw Mrs. Lightner's car arrive and park a short distance away. It was dark, but Mrs. Smith swears she saw the interior light in Mrs. Lightner's car come on and can positively state that Mrs. Lightner got out of her car.

"Several minutes later, Edith Jackson arrived and in the glow of her headlights saw Hannah Lightner putting what appeared to be a bloody lug wrench in the trunk of her car.

"When our patrolmen got there, they found the man in the dark sweater and slacks that Mrs. Smith had observed lying behind some shrubs, his skull bashed in. It turned out to be George Lightner. Because of Edith Jackson's testimony, we had probable cause to search Mrs. Lightner's automobile, and we found the bloody lug wrench in the trunk."

"So, you believe, that was Hannah Lightner's opportunity," said Mark.

"Exactly. After Mrs. Smith spotted the suspicious character and reported it, Hannah Lightner arrived next on the scene. She had no idea who the man might be, but being a bit of a fanatic about crime, she armed herself with the lug wrench and went after him. When she realized it was her husband, she saw the chance to kill him for his unfaithfulness and collect all that insurance money at the same time. All she had to do was claim that she thought she was going after a burglar, that he threatened her and she bashed his head in before she realized it was her husband. Accidental death. The insurance company has to pay off."

"That wasn't the statement she made in the beginning," countered Mark. "She said she never struck anyone."

"Of course," replied the captain. "After she killed him, she decided to deny having any knowledge of her husband's death. After all, it might prove difficult for her to explain how

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the burglar could threaten her without her recognizing it was her husband. By denying any involvement, there would be no question that the insurance company would pay off. Only thing was, we found the lug wrench, and it was too late for her to change her story. Now she won't talk to us, and I can't blame her. We got her cold. Doesn't her sudden unwillingness to talk to us clearly show her guilt?"

"Possibly. But what about the hard evidence?" asked Mark.

"What about it?" chuckled Captain Evert, sure of himself. "The lug wrench we found in Hannah Lightner's car has George Lightner's blood and hair fragments all over it, and the only fingerprints on it belong to Hannah Lightner . . . the same lug wrench Edith Jackson saw her putting into the trunk of the car. We also found bloodstains on Mrs. Lightner's hands and the clothes she was wearing that night. Is that hard enough for you?"

"I'm referring to the hard evidence you are ignoring," said Mark.

"Like what?"

"Like why was there a second *clean* lug wrench in the trunk of Mrs. Lightner's car? Why does the pointed end of the bloody lug wrench match up perfectly with the jimmy marks found on the window frames of many of the homes involved in the unsolved burglaries? Most important, why was George Lightner wearing his wristwatch above the elbow? When you finally figure out the answers to all of those questions, then you'll have another question to ask yourself. Why wasn't George Lightner wearing gloves?"

Captain Evert opened his mouth to say something, then snapped it shut. He went back to his desk chair and sat silently for several seconds before he spoke.

"You don't think Hannah Lightner killed her husband?"

"Nope," replied Mark.

Captain Evert sighed deeply. "Why can't you see the obvious? All the explainable evidence points to Hannah Lightner. She had the motive and opportunity. She even tried to lie to us. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"Only one problem."

"What's that?"

"If you don't answer the questions I've just put to you, this story can't have a last page."

"Huh?"

Mark laughed. "If you'd taken the advice I gave you once before and had become an avid mystery reader, you'd understand what I mean. You'd be reading right along, picking up that so-called 'obvious' evidence, when all of a sudden the

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story throws you a bunch of clues that don't fit in so easily. As a mystery buff, those are the clues you love and they must be explained or the story can't be concluded. You'll be responsible for the missing last page. I've put you in the hotseat. . . . Well?"

"Hogwash," replied Captain Evert indignantly. "They may be clues a mystery reader might love, but not a police captain."

"Oh, so you've decided to desert the ranks of the detectives?"

"Now, wait a while. Let me think for a few minutes."

"It's past quitting time," said Mark glancing at the wall clock. "What do you say we go hoist a few brews and . . ."

"I know, I know. You'll explain it all to me." Captain Evert had his hat and coat on in no time. "Come on. Let's get down to Kelly's before I die of curiosity."

"Whoa. Slow down," said Mark struggling unsteadily to his feet. "I got this gimpy leg, remember?"

The short walk to Kelly's Bar took nearly half an hour. Captain Evert made the most of the time by trying to figure out the answers to Mark's questions. As usual, the place was crowded, but Mark found a empty table and fell into a chair. He was surprised to see the captain sit down also.

"Aren't you going to buy the beers?"

Evert grinned. "I don't have to. I worked out the case on our way over here. Buy your own."

"Oh, sure. After I clue you in on what to look for, you're going to provide the solution. Okay, I'll bite. Two beers says you're still wrong."

Captain Evert cleared his throat. "I was wrong about George Lightner's having a mistress. What he was really doing was using the ladies' patrol schedule to burglarize houses where he wouldn't be observed. You see, George Lightner was responsible for that string of unsolved burglaries you were referring to before. He used the lug wrench to pry open the windows. That's why it matches with the jimmy marks.

"When his wife spotted him, she took the lug wrench away from him and killed him with it. That also explains why there were two lug wrenches in the car. The one that's normally there and the one she tried to conceal. In any case, Hannah Lightner is still guilty of murder."

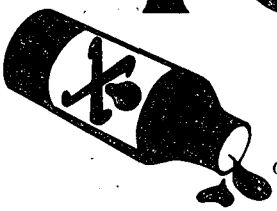
"Not bad," said Mark trying to appear impressed. "So what was the real reason she tried to hide the murder weapon?"

The captain sat quietly for a few moments, trying to think.

Mark needled him. "Come on

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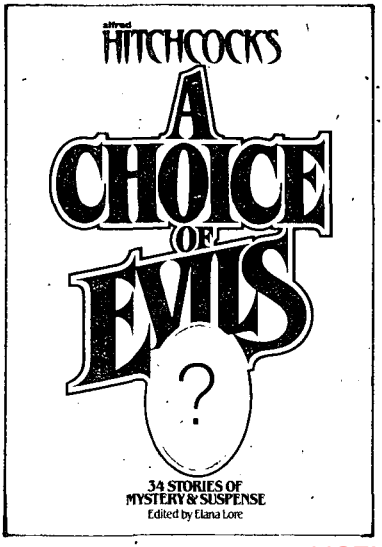
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now, I'm getting thirsty."

"I've got it," said Evert, suddenly bolting upright in his chair. "The insurance. The insurance company won't pay off if the policyholder is killed in the commission of a felony. She hid the lug wrench and planned to use the story of his running around on her so no one would realize he was a burglar."

"Well, I really am impressed," said Mark somewhat insincerely. "We just might have to reactivate you into the detective squad."

"Flattery will get you nowhere. I'll have two drafts."

"Too bad you're still wrong, at least partially," said Mark, grinning.

Captain Evert slumped down in his chair. "Okay, I give up. Who really killed George Lightner?"

"First things first," replied Mark.

Evert sighed deeply and got up and walked over to the bar. He returned and set two mugs of beer in front of Mark and one at his place. He sat down and silently waited until Mark polished off one of the beers.

"You haven't explained the wristwatch around George Lightner's upper arm yet," said Mark, positioning the second beer for imminent destruction.

"I can't. My brain has turned to gelatin."

"It's simple. It snagged on the sleeve of the sweater and was pulled up his arm as the sweater was being put on."

"How can that be? He would feel it moving up his arm."

"Not if he was dead."

Captain Evert looked a little confused. "You mean someone put the sweater on the body? Why?"

"Because that's what the burglar was supposed to be wearing. Remember? When Mrs. Smith called the other members of the Ladies Anti-Crime Association on the CB radio, she reported seeing a man wearing a dark sweater and pants creeping around the houses."

"I still don't get it."

Mark pushed the mug aside and leaned forward on the table. "Someone had to put the dark sweater on George Lightner's body so everyone would think that George Lightner was the burglar. That someone would likely be the real burglar."

"But how did George Lightner get to be a dead body?"

"He was never far away. He went to investigate the suspicious activity and the burglar killed him with a lug wrench, the same lug wrench used to pry open the windows of the homes in the unsolved cases.

"If it was our Lakemar burglar, he probably wore gloves. That's why we never recovered

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any fingerprints at the unsolved break-ins. He decided to leave the lug wrench next to the body so Lightner would be incriminated by the jimmy marks we had on file. Then he put his sweater on Lightner's body."

"And how did the burglar find out the description Mrs. Smith had radioed out?" asked the captain, suspecting a flaw.

"Unless burglars are carrying CB radios nowadays, there are only two ways he could have found out. Either Martha Smith told him or he knew in advance what she was going to radio out.

"In the first case, she would have had to recognize the burglar after she had radioed the description. Remember, it was dark. He might have walked into better light or he might have recognized her car and approached. Then she would have told him what she'd reported.

"The second possibility: she was part of a plan she and the burglar had to frame someone for the robberies.

"In either case, who would she do that for? Keep in mind, George Lightner wasn't the only man who had the patrol schedule for the association."

"Mrs. Smith's husband?" ventured Captain Evert.

Mark nodded in agreement. "It was obvious the burglar had the inside track on where to strike next if you review the dates of the robberies and compare them with the schedule."

"I was correct about Mrs. Lightner, wasn't I?" said Evert.

"Pretty much so. After Mr. Smith killed George Lightner, he set up the incriminating evidence and then took off. Hannah Lightner arrived and found the body. When she saw the dark sweater and slacks and the lug wrench, she was certain her husband was the long-sought-after burglar. She wanted the insurance money, so she tried to hide the wrench without realizing her actions would make her the leading suspect.

"George Lightner wasn't wearing gloves, so his fingerprints as well as those of Mrs. Lightner should have been on the lug wrench . . . but they weren't. That fact plus the location of his wristwatch convinced me he was being framed as the burglar. When I explained it to Hannah Lightner, she realized she would receive the insurance money after all and would no longer be considered a prime suspect, so she told me what I already suspected: she had found the body and attempted to hide the murder weapon." Mark paused long enough to down half the contents of the second mug.

"So you got the murderer," stated Evert. "How come you haven't concluded the case?"

"Because I wanted to dis-

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cover why George Lightner was in that area of the neighborhood at the time of his murder. Was he there to see Janet Huddle as you concluded, or was he brought there to be set up by the Smiths? The answer will have a direct effect on the extent of Martha Smith's involvement in the murder."

"Aha!" said the captain, feeling some satisfaction. "So my mistress conclusion still might be correct?"

Mark took a ticket stub from his pocket and laid it on the table. "I took the liberty of lifting this from Martha Smith's purse while I was visiting her at her judo class this morning."

Captain Evert picked it up. "This is a ticket to the theater for the same night the murder took place. Martha Smith's judo movie ticket?"

Mark nodded.

"Doesn't that suggest my mistress theory is correct?" continued the captain. "It seems unlikely Mrs. Smith would have gone to the movies at all if she was planning to lure George Lightner into a trap."

"Actually, it suggests her involvement in a conspiracy with her husband to frame Lightner. She lied. She never saw the movie at all. At that theater, tickets aren't torn in half. Instead, they're punched."

Captain Evert looked down sadly at his beer. "You'd think I could be correct in at least one of my original conclusions. From now on I'll leave the 'detectiving' to the detectives."

"The job is not quite over. I'm fairly certain Martha Smith picked up George Lightner and took him to the spot where her husband was waiting to kill him. She probably got Lightner to leave the car by suggesting she spotted something. But I'm still interested in what she said to get him to go with her. Am I back on the case?" asked Mark.

"You sure are," said the captain, delivering a heavy slap to Mark's right leg.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

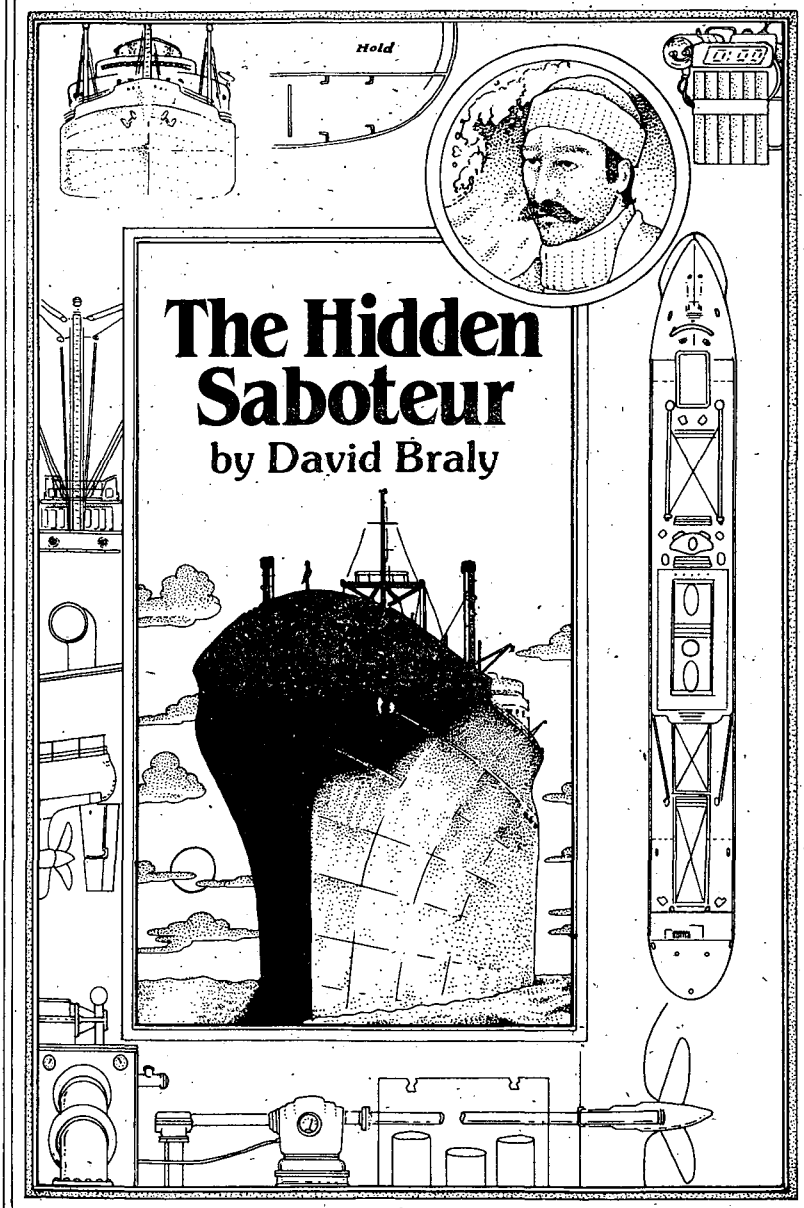


Arthur Tress

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The winning entry for the March Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

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The Hidden Saboteur

by David Braly

Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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The house was palatial, with tall white walls that shone in the oppressive Arabian sun. Abdul Adr rolled up the date-tree-lined driveway in a black Mercedes driven by a chauffeur who never spoke, employed by a man whose identity Adr hadn't been told.

When they arrived at the house, the chauffeur got out and opened Adr's door. He pointed toward a long white stone stairway that led from the driveway to the second floor of the mansion. He then slid back into the car and drove away.

Adr climbed the steps. He'd been told by his superiors to come to this place, and that was the only reason he didn't panic. He was fearful, however.

A man in a blue business suit appeared at the top of the steps. He was a short, fat individual with heavy black eyebrows and dense grey hair. His jowls were wide and his skin dark. Adr knew that he was an Arab. He didn't understand why many Arab businessmen wore their native costume in the West but Western clothing in their homeland.

"It's hot today," said the man in the blue suit. The code.

"It's hot every day," responded Adr, also by prearrangement.

Adr finished the climb to find himself upon a stone porch. The man in blue motioned him into open double doors.

He passed through the doors into a hallway, followed by the other man. The floor was black and white tile, the walls red with smooth Lebanese cedar, and the ceiling bore an elaborate blue and yellow Turkish mosaic.

"Follow me, please," said the man in blue, taking the lead.

He guided Adr into a small room near the end of the hall. An Iranian carpet covered its floor, its walls were white, and its ceiling a dull blue. A large, open, multipaned window overlooked the estate and beyond to the city. The only furniture in the room was a small cedar table surrounded by several large armchairs. One of the armchairs was occupied by a man who rose to his feet when Adr entered.

Adr guessed this second man's age to be forty. He had black hair, a hooked nose, and suspicious black eyes that shifted endlessly. He, too, was dark and wore a blue suit and certainly was an Arab.

"This," said the elder man, indicating Adr, "is the representative of the Crescent Moon Strike Force." Then, indicating the other man, he said to Adr, "And this is a representative of certain Bahrain businessmen."

The two younger men nodded politely to each other.

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"There is a proposition for the Crescent Moon," continued the older man. "It's necessary that a decision about it be reached before you leave this room. Do you have that sort of authority?"

"I do," said Adr.

"Good. Then I'll leave you two alone." He bowed slightly and left.

After the other two men had seated themselves, the business representative said: "I'll come right to the point. The men I am here for need some dirty work done. The sort of dirty work that the Crescent Moon is known to do occasionally for a price."

"What sort of 'dirty work,' friend?"

"Sabotage—for which we'll pay a hundred million dollars American."

"How much?"

"One hundred million."

"That is . . . that is a great amount of money."

"Then you're interested?"

"Of course."

"Have you heard of Alexis Pangalos?"

"Naturally." Who hadn't?

Adr recalled to his mind everything that he knew about Pangalos, what he'd read in the newspapers and magazines. He remembered that Pangalos had been born in southern Greece shortly after the turn of the century. He was the son of a small shipowner, a child of the lower middle class. He'd inherited his father's ship when the old man died (Alexis was about twenty, Adr thought), and expanded the business quickly. Soon he had three old freighters plying the trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean. Pangalos was twenty-four when a storm broke up the ship he was aboard. Everyone drowned except Alexis and two other men, who clung to the hull of the wreck. They drifted at sea for many days, finally being rescued by a coal carrier called the *Toltec,* named for an ancient Mexican tribe of Indians who were conquered by the Aztecs. Thereafter Pangalos named all of his ships *Toltec* this or *Toltec* that.

Pangalos saw World War II coming and sold his ships before its arrival. He was in London when Greece was invaded, but returned home to fight in the underground.

After the war Pangalos built his first oil tanker. He built many others in the following decades. Soon the Pangalos Tanker Group had some of the world's largest supertankers.

Now Alexis was an old man and his empire was administered by his eldest son, Constantine. But it was no secret that while Constantine administered the empire, its expansion and policies were controlled by old Alexis. It'd been his de-

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cision—not Constantine's—to refuse cooperation with the Greek junta, his decision to expand the Pangalos fleet while other tanker owners retrenched, and his decision to build the *Toltec Challenger*, the world's first million-ton oil tanker, the launching of which would occur in only a few weeks.

"You may have read," said the business representative, "that Mr. Pangalos has continued to expand his tanker fleet despite economic conditions which would ordinarily have prompted such a man to retrench. To do this, he has had to borrow large sums of money from certain banks and other financial institutions in Bahrain."

"The people you represent," said Adr.

"Precisely. For collateral, the Pangalos Tanker Group has put up everything that it owns. Everything. Oil tankers, real estate in a dozen countries, office buildings, airplanes—"

"He must have borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars."

"Indeed he did."

"Can he repay it?"

The other man smiled. "That's where you come in, friend . . . Alexis Pangalos is what Westerners like to call a 'wheeler-dealer.' He juggles money, makes deals to cover deals, buys on margin, that sort of thing. A payment on the notes we hold from him will be due shortly. If he cannot make payment, we can foreclose on the entire Pangalos empire. I don't need to tell you what such a prospect means to my employers in Bahrain."

"Can he make the payment?"

"Yes. We've learned of a deal centered around the *Toltec Challenger* struck between Pangalos and several New York and Houston banks. During the ship's maiden voyage it will stop on the eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula to fill four of its five tanks with oil. This oil will be taken to South Africa and off-loaded, at which time a sum of money large enough to cover the first note payment will be deposited to the Pangalos accounts in London and Beirut. That would, of course, cost us the Pangalos properties."

"Why only four of the tanks?" asked Adr. "Why not all five?"

"I suppose it's the oil glut. Even the South Africans don't need as much oil as that monster can deliver."

Adr had read much about the "monster" during the last few months. Although the nuclear-powered ship was a technological wonder, it had serious drawbacks. Its maximum speed was eight knots. And its draft was so deep that no port in the world could receive it; oil would have to be carried to it by other,

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smaller tankers, then pumped aboard through long rubber hoses.

"You want us to destroy the *Toltec Challenger?"* asked Adr.

"Yes. But only after it has taken the oil aboard. We've learned that Alexis Pangalos hasn't been able to insure either the ship or the oil that it'll carry. This first million-ton vessel has the insurance companies frightened. Several would insure it, but only for premiums so high that Pangalos wouldn't pay."

"And if the tanker goes down without insurance, your chances of foreclosing are increased."

"Increased? They're guaranteed. He's gambling everything he owns on this ship, and he's already dangerously overextended." The Bahrain representative removed a folded sheet of paper from an inner pocket of his suit. "Here is the crew list. All the officers and crew are Pangalos veterans who are loyal to their employer, but you might find someone who can assist you in some manner."

He handed the paper to Adr.

"I don't know," continued the Bahrain man, "how you could destroy the ship, except perhaps by attacking it with a gunboat or airplane, without being killed yourself. If the oil aboard explodes, it would be like the blast of an atomic bomb."

"That big?"

"Many years ago a little fifty thousand ton oil tanker blew up off the coast of Mexico. The explosion was heard for fifty miles in every direction, created hurricane-force winds, and the following day, many miles away, a black rain fell from the oil that'd been shot into the air and condensed by the blast. Cattle ate the grass that it fell upon. They died."

"Fantastic." Abdul Adr looked at the crew list again. He smiled. "Yes," he said, "fantastic."

Alexis Pangalos stood beside the Japanese prime minister, smiling, nodding, and occasionally waving to the crowd below. Another triumph. Perhaps his last. He was seventy-nine now, but his age wasn't why it might be his last. His optimism and good health could see him through another ten or twenty years. No, this time the trouble was financial. The Pangalos empire was nearly bankrupt. He and a handful of his top executives knew it, as did a few other people: the bankers in Bahrain, a couple of Arab tycoons, a Greek competitor or two, and the forty-year-old man who stood on the other side of him, his son Constantine.

To other people, Alexis Pangalos revealed nothing about his state of mind. He stood on the platform, smiling, nodding,

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waving, his long silver hair rustling in the warm breeze. He stood straight as the flagpole that flew the Liberian colors above the *Toltec Challenger,* a big man whose clothes looked clumsy because of his six foot six inch frame and his bulging muscles. His face was dark, deeply lined, and hard. His sea-blue eyes were outlined by bags below, thick brows above, and deep wrinkles at their sides, but they never flinched, seldom even blinked. They, too, defied age, sun, and wind, and were steady.

Constantine Pangalos shifted his feet, and alternately smiled and frowned. He looked more like a businessman than did his father. He was as tall as Alexis, but his hair was jet black, oily, and didn't blow in the breeze. His face was brown but unweathered, unlined, unwrinkled. His eyes were shielded by large, thick sunglasses. Constantine's clothes fit him perfectly. He was a good advertisement for his tailor.

Before them was the stern of the *Toltec Challenger.* It waited. The officers and crew aboard waited. The crowd waited. The press waited. The prime minister waited. Waited for the ship to be launched and begin its maiden voyage. All the speeches had been made, all the salutes fired, all the music played. The fanfare was over.

Nicholas Nasoulia waited, too. He stood against the railing in front of the bridge on the superstructure walkway and held himself as straight as the flagpole, as straight as Alexis Pangalos. He didn't mind waiting. He enjoyed ceremony. And he knew that many people were watching him stand there in his bright white uniform. Nasoulia wasn't tall like the Pangalos men. He was five nine and weighed one hundred seventy pounds, but aboard ship his authority was greater than theirs. He was the captain. The fifty-one-year-old captain of the largest ship built in the history of the world.

The First Officer, Costa Minotis, stood to the right and slightly behind Nasoulia. He was only an inch taller than Nasoulia, and he weighed the same. Costa, too, stood straight, but he didn't like it, not for so long a time. He wanted the ceremony to end so that they could be underway, could get on with the real business of running the ship.

Costa wondered how much money the delay—ten minutes now!—was costing Alexis Pangalos. Not that it would matter to Pangalos, who Costa knew had money to burn. But he wondered just the same. When he'd been told that the *Toltec Challenger* was one million deadweight tons, Costa had figured

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out that its running costs would be about forty-five thousand dollars a day. That was before he learned that the ship would be nuclear. He knew too little about nuclear engines to figure the cost. He'd heard only two solid figures about the huge ship: that it had cost six hundred million dollars to build; and that the eight hundred tons of paint used to coat it had cost $148,899.27. All Costa knew was that the fixed expenses were costing Pangalos money even while the ship stood still in the water.

Suddenly the crowd on shore cheered.

Costa guessed that the woman selected to launch the ship had finally clobbered the stern with her bottle of champagne.

He was right. The great ship began to slide forward slowly.

"We'd better go inside," said Nasoulia. Costa nodded and followed the captain in.

Already the yellow and red lights on the instruments inside the long, wide bridge were on, burning steadily to light up an otherwise dark room. The instruments hummed. Five men in the room watched separate instrument panels. Costa had never seen a more beautiful bridge.

"Any problems?" Nasoulia asked a middle-aged man who had short-clipped brown hair and thick glasses.

"None," said the man, the navigator Pericles Maverrichi. "Our fears about not clearing Nagasaki harbor were groundless."

"Good. Take it to top speed as soon as we're in deep water and shoot that into the computer the course is charted on."

Costa watched the bridge activity for a few minutes, then walked over to the windows. He looked at nearby boats and distant ships, at the calm sea, and at what he could see of his own ship. Eventually he focused upon one particular seaman who was walking on the catwalk toward the superstructure. He watched him until the seaman walked beneath Costa's line of sight.

The seaman entered the superstructure and proceeded to his own cabin. His room was equipped with a television set, a multiband radio, and the usual expensive furniture that supertankers provide for their crewmen. Original oil paintings decorated the walls. He was alone in the rom. Other crewmen had their wives aboard (also a common practice on modern supertankers), but his remained in Greece. He was thinking about buying a game computer at the ship's store and putting it in his room to pass the time.

There were three items in his room that he didn't get at the ship's store: a Mauser, a

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detonator, and a bomb.

The saboteur was aboard.

Charles Giscaret leaned back in his chair, a smile of quiet satisfaction on his face. Before him on the small formica table were the remains of two legs of chicken, a salad, a bowl of gravy-soaked mashed potatoes, and a slice of watermelon. Also an empty wine glass. Giscaret glanced around the dining room. There were only a half dozen other men still seated. That, he thought, was the trouble with people who weren't French: they ate too fast.

He felt a nudge against his right ankle. He didn't have to look down to know what was responsible for it.

The fifty-two-year-old Frenchman looked at the chicken scraps with a new sense of guilt. No meat remained on them. Tonight he'd eaten the meat right to the bone.

Giscaret bent down and spoke to the tiger-striped cat: "Sorry, *mon ami,* there's nothing for you tonight. Old Charles has been a pig."

The cat stared at him several seconds, then vigorously rubbed its head against Giscaret's leg. Giscaret repeated that he had nothing left. The cat ignored the statement and continued to rub its head against his leg.

"Ah, cats!" Giscaret took his plate of chicken bones and lowered it to where it was under the cat's head. The cat sniffed at the bones for a moment, looked up, and meowed accusingly. Giscaret shrugged his shoulders. "I have to eat, too."

The cat hurried over to another table.

For several minutes Giscaret remained at his own table, digesting his food while he thought about tomorrow's work. Work? Hardly, not aboard this ship. The nuclear engine—and everything else—worked perfectly, and Chief Engineer Giscaret looked forward to spending much of his time in the Engine Control Room (ECR) reading old magazines.

After three or four minutes of thinking about this, Giscaret decided it was time to leave. He placed his glass beside the plate and saucers on his tray and carried the tray to the warming table. He then walked across the dining room to the deck door. When he opened it, the cat suddenly reappeared and dashed out.

Giscaret walked to the port side and looked over the railing at the sea. The air was warm; they were approaching South Africa.

"Hello, Charles."

Giscaret turned and greeted Costa Minotis.

"Nice night," said the First Officer.

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"Yes. I enjoy nights like these: a big yellow moon floating atop a black sea. Although I miss the motion."

"Motion?" asked Minotis. "Oh, you mean the tossing. Yes, these ships are too heavy for tossing."

Too heavy for many things, thought Minotis. Too heavy to stop fast, or to turn around, or to notice—things. Minotis had learned that last fact aboard his previous ship, the three hundred thousand ton *Toltec Runner*. Once—after an apparently peaceful, uneventful cruise—the *Runner* had put into the Hague for minor repairs. Workers found that the ship's hull had been marked by wide and long scratches, from the waterline to a height of ten feet. Obviously the *Runner* had hit and destroyed a trawler or some other boat without the tanker crew's being aware of it at the time. Not an uncommon occurrence, Costa knew, but a chill went down his spine when he caught himself wondering how big a ship the *Toltec Challenger* could destroy without the crew's being aware of it.

"If we had to stop immediately," Costa asked the engineer, "how long would it be before the ship was still?"

"From the speed we're going now, four miles."

Costa shook his head. "I hope nothing gets in our way."

Giscaret chuckled.

For several minutes they stood silently, looking out across the black waves. Then Giscaret turned and said, "I must check the indicators."

"Mind if I tag along?"

"Of course not. During our training in Japan I could tell that you were interested in nuclear engines. And they are the way of the future."

The two men walked back toward the superstructure. A young man and woman on bikes rode past them. Costa and Giscaret reached the superstructure, entered, walked half its width, and took an elevator down two stories. They talked while they walked, mostly about engines. Costa told the engineer how the nineteeth century American ship and rail tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt had advertised his steamships as being safe from explosions, a great concern of the public at the time, by claiming that his had no boilers. Giscaret got a big laugh out of that.

When they got out of the elevator, they proceeded down a corridor to a door that bore a sign reading: "ENGINE CONTROL ROOM—UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL KEEP OUT." Costa followed Giscaret inside.

The room was large. It was also bright because of the gold light of the overhead bulbs and the red and blue flashing lights of the instruments. Every-

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where there were modern, sleek computerized machines, bright, shiny, clean, operative. Their many small lights flashed off and on in a slow, normal, quiet way, and the machines hummed softly.

"Where's Saphos?" asked Giscaret.

"Who?"

"Leonidas Saphos, one of my assistants. He's supposed to be here watching the damn instruments. This room's supposed to have someone in it at all times . . . Saphos! Where the hell are you?!"

"I'll check the lavatory," said Costa.

"No, wait. Look. There's blood on the floor."

There was. For a moment the pair stood silent and motionless. The quiet was accentuated by the hum of the machinery, the silent rhythmic flashing of the dull blue and red panel bulbs.

Costa Minotis saw more blood: several drops between where they stood and a far corner of the room. The actual corner itself was blocked from view by a row of seven foot tall steel cabinets. They'd been placed there to be out of the way, but not pushed against the wall because the door into the nuclear power plant was behind them.

Costa walked the long distance to the cabinets, then stepped around them. On the floor between the cabinets and the engine door was a man's body. He was belly-down in a pool of blood.

Costa stooped down to examine him.

Suddenly the door next to him swung open. A gloved man in seaman's pants with a seaman's shirt tied around his head to hide his face leaped out and hit Costa with a metal cylindrical object. Costa went over, less from hurt than from surprise and caution.

He got up fast.

Costa ran around the cabinets in time to see his assailant hurrying out of the ECR door into the corridor. Giscaret was on the floor, apparently knocked over by a shove instead of the metal object. At least the stream of profanity coming from the chief engineer's mouth indicated that he hadn't been hurt.

"Sound an alarm!" yelled Costa as he ran by Giscaret. Then he, too, hurried out.

He saw the attacker running down the corridor. Costa pursued him. He couldn't see who he was because the man still had the shirt wrapped around his head and was otherwise dressed normally.

The attacker ran past the elevator. He hurried on, finally reaching the door that opened into a stairway and disappearing into it.

Costa ran past the elevator

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and continued toward the stairwell door. When he reached it, he pushed it open.

The man stood in front of him, waiting, his right hand drawn back with the metal object gripped in it.

He swung, hit Costa on the jaw. Costa fell backwards onto the floor. The man turned, ran, and the door pulled itself shut.

Although stunned badly by the blow and hurting, Costa managed to stumble to his feet. "That's two I owe you," he muttered, then he swung open the door again and stepped onto the landing. The other man wasn't in sight.

Which way to go? The man would probably seek his cabin in the area above, where the crew's quarters were located.

A loud, shrill whistle blew three times. The alert was being sounded. Instantly every crewman in his cabin would rush out and take his position for an emergency. The assailant would be only one man among many, hidden in the numbers of his fellow workers, unless Costa could catch him before he reached the area of the cabins.

Costa bounded up the stairs three steps at a time.

He passed the first deck below the main deck and kept going.

He reached the main deck, winded but with his adrenalin still pushing him forward. He threw open the stairwell door and entered the corridor. At the end of the corridor the door leading to the outside was closing itself.

Had the other man just gone out?

Costa ran toward the door.

Reached it. Threw it open. And found himself facing a young seaman—who wasn't winded.

"Did you see anyone come out of here in the last few seconds?" demanded Costa.

"Uh—well, yes, sir. I'm not sure who, but I think it was Yorgo."

"Yorgo Kamatropoulos?"

"Yes, sir. He went towards the bow, sir."

"Come with me."

Before Costa lay the great length of the ship, its bow so far away that it was invisible in the night. Costa hurried onto the catwalk and proceeded toward the bow. The catwalk stretched down the deck's middle, from the superstructure to the bow, and was raised above the deck itself, which was often underwater during turbulent weather. Thick pipes ran beside the catwalk on both sides, and there were six firefighting pump stations spread at equal distances along it.

Costa was too winded to run. He walked briskly, though, almost running. He could hardly breathe by the time he and the

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seaman behind him reached the empty helicopter pad halfway between the superstructure and bow.

Just past it, Costa saw movement out of the corner of his right eye, among the pipes parallel to the catwalk.

He stopped, the seaman almost walking into him. "You!" shouted Costa toward the pipes. "What are you doing down there?"

"Sir?" answered a voice from the darkness.

There was more movement. A man emerged from the darkness, coming toward Costa. He walked slowly because the deck was slanted away from the catwalk and was slippery. He climbed to the catwalk.

"Sorry, sir, I couldn't hear you."

He was Wilhelm Vogel, a thirty-seven-year-old German crewman with blond hair, a deeply-lined face, and only half his teeth remaining. Minotis knew him. Vogel had served aboard the *Toltec Runner*. He was a bully at times, but a fine seaman.

"I asked what you were doing," said Costa.

"Oh. I heard a sizzling sound down there, so I was checking it out. I was afraid that there might be trouble with one of the service pipelines . . . Didn't find a thing, though. Of course, it's pretty dark to be looking, but I couldn't hear the noise again, either. Someone should re-check it when it's light."

"Did you see or hear anyone come by here in the last few minutes?"

"No sir. But with the dark and the noise of the sea—"

"Have you see Yorgo Kamatropoulos tonight?"

"Not since dinner."

"Come with us," said Costa. He resumed walking toward the bow.

The area ahead was brightly lit. A tall pole stood at the bow, and on top of it were ten beacons, each aimed in different directions. These lit the bow as a convenience to the crew and as a warning to any boats or ships that might stray into the tanker's area.

Finally they reached the end of the catwalk. Ahead, clear under the beacon pole, were the huge machines that operated the anchors. There was one machine on each side, their winding poles thick with heavy, enormous chains.

A man stood next to the starboard machine. Like Vogel, he wore a crewman's work clothes, the same sort worn by the attacker. This man, however, had something that Vogel didn't: a metal cylindrical object balanced in his hands.

Costa leaped down the steps onto the lower bow deck, followed by Vogel and the other

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seaman. Only then did the man by the machine look up and see them. He straightened when he saw the First Officer, but he didn't try to run. He was about thirty-five, had a sledgehammer jaw and big floppy ears. He wasn't Yorgo; he was a veteran seaman named Stylianos Douris.

Costa approached him. "What's that?" he asked Douris.

Douris looked down at the metal object he held. It was about eighteen inches long, two inches in diameter, made of metal that had been painted black. The black paint was barely visible now, covered as it was by fresh red blood.

"I don't know," said Douris. "I was checking the forward thermometer and suddenly it came flying down and landed about twenty feet from me. I guess somebody threw it from the catwalk. I looked up, but I couldn't see anybody."

"When did this happen?"

"Oh, I guess about two, three minutes ago."

"And since that time you've just been standing here holding it?"

"Well, uh, yes sir. Trying to figure out what it is. It's covered with blood, but it don't look like a kitchen utensil to me. Looks sort of like a pipe."

Wilhelm Vogel stepped over and took the metal object from Douris. He walked to the beacon pole where he could examine it closely beneath the lights.

After several seconds, Vogel said, "It's part of a bicycle pump."

Costa took the pump, examined it a few seconds, then instructed Douris and Vogel to follow him back to the superstructure.

As Costa mounted the catwalk, he wondered where Yorgo Kamatropoulos was.

Costa Minotis stood in the ECR with Vogel and Douris, facing Captain Nasoulia, who held the bicycle pump in his gloved hands. Minotis had already explained to him everything that happened since he chased the attacker out of the ECR. Nasoulia had immediately cancelled the alert and ordered Yorgo Kamatropoulos to report to him in the ECR.

"Saphos' head was bashed in," said Nasoulia. "That explains the blood on the pump."

"I was afraid that it would," said Costa.

"Giscaret and Orakis have already made a preliminary search of the engine area. They found part of a detonator wire. Therefore, the killer is also a saboteur, and there's a bomb somewhere in there. Giscaret will direct a thorough search of the power plant and the entire engine area."

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"I wonder how long we've got."

"Damned if I know. Maybe hours, maybe seconds. We have to assume that it is a time bomb, and that normally restricts the time to twenty-four hours."

Nasoulia glared at the two crewmen who'd returned with Costa. He clasped his hands behind his back, paced up and down in front of them, looking at them contemptuously. "It just came flying down, did it?"

Douris started to answer, hesitated, then nodded.

"Costa," said the captain, "I want the bow area checked at first light. If it flew down, it had to hit and bounce, and that would leave spots of blood. The sea's calm, so no water would flow over the bow to wash them away. Meanwhile, post a guard at the bow end of the catwalk to keep everyone away."

"Yes, sir."

Nasoulia next looked at Vogel. "Sizzling noise, eh?"

"That's right, sir," said the German.

"It couldn't be that you ran out on deck after you killed Saphos? That you ran to the bow to dispose of the bike pump, but found someone there and had to content yourself with throwing it onto the bow bridge instead of throwing it off the ship? That you ran back towards the superstructure, but saw Officer Minotis coming and hid among the service pipes?"

"No, sir. In fact, it makes no sense to me why the killer would run to the bow. If I had been the killer, sir, I'd have run to the edge of the ship and tossed the pump off immediately."

Costa said nothing but mentally agreed with Vogel. Why had the murderer run all the way to the bow to dispose of the murder weapon when he could have more easily hurried to either the starboard or port sides? The bow of the *Toltec Challenger* was a quarter mile from the superstructure.

The door from the corridor opened and twelve men filed in. One, in the lead, looked around the room until he saw the captain. "We were told to come down here," he said. "Something about a search."

"Go into the engine area," said Nasoulia. "The door is behind those cabinets over there. Mr. Giscaret will tell you what to do."

"Yes, sir."

"One more thing," said Nasoulia. "Don't disturb the body in front of the door."

"Uh—yes, sir."

"Good lad."

The crew glanced at each other, then headed for the cabinets.

"What are our chances of finding the bomb in a place

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so huge?" asked Costa.

"Almost no chance at all," said Nasoulia. "We can try, however. We'll look primarily in the area where the detonator wire was found."

"Any chance of having a bomb squad flown in from South Africa?"

"Perhaps. I'll radio the Pangalos people in London after we're through here and ask. Maybe a helicopter could fly them aboard."

The corridor door opened again. A seaman entered. He was about thirty-three, had black hair, was short but muscular, and he looked confused and nervous. Yorgo Kamatropoulos.

"Where were you," asked Nasoulia, sweeping his left hand around in order to look at his wristwatch, "a half hour ago?"

"Uh, in my cabin . . . sir."

"You were seen walking onto the main deck and proceeding toward the catwalk. Why were you outside?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but someone's made a mistake. I haven't been outside the super for two hours."

"I repeat, Mr. Kamatropoulos, that you were seen."

Kamatropoulos' face reddened, and the muscles there and in his neck stiffened. "And I repeat that I wasn't there."

Nasoulia didn't react as visibly as Kamatropoulos, but Costa could see that he didn't like the latter's attitude. Although Greek, Nasoulia had been British-trained; he put a premium on discipline.

"Do you have witnesses to prove that you were inside your cabin?" asked Nasoulia.

"No, sir. Why should I? What's going on?"

The corridor door opened again. The ship's doctor and another man entered with a gurney. "Where's the body?" asked the doctor.

"Behind those cabinets," said Nasoulia, nodding in their direction. Then he turned his attention to Kamatropoulos again. "There's the answer to your question, mister. Murder. And sabotage."

"And you think that I was involved?"

"You were seen leaving the superstructure."

"I didn't leave it! I've been in my cabin for the last two hours."

"Doing what?"

"Listening to Radio South Africa and reading a book that I checked out of the ship's library."

"Why weren't you at dinner?"

"I wasn't hungry. I ate an apple in my room." When Nasoulia looked at him disbelievingly, Kamatropoulos added: "If you wish, *sir*, you may go to my cabin and examine my trash container for the core."

Nasoulia stiffened. "Don't be impertinent."

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"Sir, I'm falsely accused and I resent it."

"I don't give a damn what the bloody hell you resent! I'll not tolerate impertinence aboard my ship."

Nasoulia turned to Costa. "I'll have to occupy my time with supervising the bomb search and communicating with the London office, so I'm putting you in charge of trying to find out which of these three men murdered Saphos and planted the bomb. I don't need to tell you how important it is that we find that device immediately. Obviously if we can identify the murderer, we can question him about the location of the bomb."

Costa had no illusions about what form the "questioning" would take. Aboard a ship the captain's word was law. Nasoulia, proud to be in charge of the largest ship ever built, would not see it blasted from beneath him without trying every method to make the saboteur talk. That would include threats and torture.

"Meanwhile," continued Nasoulia, looking coldly at the three suspects, "all of you will be confined in one of the storage rooms."

Phillip Osopla shook his head slowly while he looked at the meters before him. Although he was Second Officer of the *Toltec Challenger* and had been with the Pangalos organization all of his adult life, he remained in many ways similar to the simple Greek fisherman that his father had been. He didn't know about a lot of things, especially technological things, and he had to cover his insecurity with his humor. Fortunately, he had been blessed with an excellent sense of humor.

Osopla felt ignorant looking at the triple row of meters. Each row had fifteen meters. Although all the meters were eighteen inches in diameter, the number of needles they contained varied. So, too, Osopla suspected, did their functions. And he couldn't even guess what their functions might be.

Something about the meters bothered him.

He stood close to them—only a foot away—examining them. He wondered if they bothered him only because their function was a mystery to him. No, that couldn't be it; almost every technological item aboard was a mystery to him. Perhaps, then, it was something relating to the bomb.

Although there were three rows and many meters, there wasn't room between them for anything the size of a bomb. The spaces were too narrow and awkward.

Osopla, silently twisting one end of his handlebar mustache,

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stared closely at one meter. The face was white, with a small, circular row of numbers lying close to numerous lines and dashes and dots. In the center was a hole, through which protruded the needle pin. Beneath the hole he could see a few delicate copper wires. Around and beyond these wires he could see nothing. Because there was nothing to see.

He quickly examined another meter. Like the first, it appeared to be hollow between its face and back except for the center.

When Osopla examined a third meter, he saw evidence of wires, knobs, and other metal in the space between the face and the back.

Ditto for a fourth and fifth, but a sixth appeared hollow like the first and second.

"Charles!" yelled Osopla. "Come here!"

"On my way!" shouted Giscaret from a distance.

While he waited for the engineer, Osopla continued to examine the meters. He took special note of their length and width. He was sure that the amount of space between the face and back was sufficient to conceal a bomb in one of the hollow meters. He was also sure that Giscaret and the crewmen—involved in searching through several floors of gears, boxes, wires, pumps, panels, and the like—hadn't checked meters.

Giscaret came up. "What is it?"

"These," said Osopla, pointing to the meters. "Some are hollow."

"Hollow?"

"Between the faces and the backs. Just a few tiny wires."

"Of course. That's because they don't need any mechanical gears other than . . . Oh no!"

"I think we'd better have them opened, Charles. And any other meters in the engine area and power plant."

" 'Any other'? You mean 'all other.' "

"How many meters are there?"

"I don't know. Dozens of banks like this. Hundreds and hundreds of meters. And they're just one more part of this whole blasted . . . " Giscaret shook his head. "Sorry," he said.

"How many meters in the area where Orakis found the piece from the detonator wire?"

"Oh, maybe fifty or sixty."

"You'd better search them first."

The killer snapped open a folding chair and sat upon it. The other two suspects did the same.

He hadn't planned on getting trapped out on the deck like that. He'd planned to run up on deck, go to the side, and toss

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over the bike pump and his gun. But two men had been talking on the starboard side and a woman was staring out at the waves from the rail at the port side. He'd had to run out onto the catwalk.

Then the second problem. Not throwing the bicycle pump piece far enough. Good thing he'd worn gloves.

At least the gun had gone clear over the bow. He hadn't used the gun, of course, but possession of it would have revealed him as the killer. Even if they found it when they searched his room they would know. Guns were forbidden on board.

He was breaking a lot of rules this voyage.

He glanced at his wristwatch.

Two hours to go. Then the ship would go up. Everyone aboard would die. He would die. In two hours.

Costa was seated at his desk when the seaman knocked and entered. He handed Costa the files he'd requested. They were the personnel files on Vogel, Douris, and Kamatropoulos. Obviously the destruction of the ship would also be the destruction of the saboteur. He had to look into their histories, see if any of the three might be suicidal. Other possibilities: personal problems or some deep hatred of Pangalos or Nasoulia, a hatred so deep they would be willing to die to soothe it.

Each of the three manila folders contained—one sheet of paper!

"Wait a minute," said Costa. "Is this all?"

"Yes, sir," said the seaman. He was Nasoulia's clerk, a thin little man with dirty fingernails.

"I asked for the complete personnel records of Douris, Vogel, and Kamatropoulos. You're saying that each man has only—only a paragraph in his record!"

"At the moment, yes."

"What do you mean, 'at the moment'?"

"Well, Mr. Minotis," began the clerk, his voice acquiring an obnoxious I'm-an-expert-I'm-a-teacher tone, "there are two complete files for every employee aboard a Pangalos tanker. One file is kept at the main office in London, the other aboard the tanker. However, because the *Toltec Challenger* has only just been launched, we don't yet have our copies of the files on our men. All we have aboard are the most minuscule records, useful perhaps for the captain to make background evaluations of the crew, but nothing more."

Costa banged his fist on his desk and swore.

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The clerk started to leave.

"One more thing," snapped Costa. "It feels like the ship is slowing down. Is it?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Nasoulia has ordered the ship to come to a dead stop."

"Why?"

"Instructions from London. All crewmen are to help look for the bomb. That makes them unavailable to run the ship."

The men who crowded into the engine area were confused and puzzled. They had been told to abandon work, let the ship come to a standstill, and report to the engine area above the nuclear power plant. Every man aboard ship had been told that, with only a dozen exceptions.

They stood close to each other, talking in whispers, questioning and speculating. Popular rumor said that there was a bomb aboard.

Everyone fell silent when Captain Nasoulia walked in. He hurried to a clear area near the wall.

"Men," he yelled, "we're in trouble. We have strong reason to believe that there is a bomb in this area of the ship."

The men stirred, whispered.

"We've had men searching for it, but without result. We don't know how much time we may have left. I don't need to tell you what a bomb exploding aboard this particular ship would mean, what would happen. Suffice it to say that we'd all be killed."

Nasoulia paused. The men remained silent, gloomy.

"I want every man here," continued Nasoulia, "to hunt for that bomb. Do it thoroughly, but do it quickly . . . I need not mention that you're in no greater danger here in the nuclear power plant at the stern of the ship than you would be at the bow. If the bomb goes, we all go, wherever we are . . . We have pulled as close to the coast as our draft will allow. A ship is on its way to evacuate you, other crewmen, and the women on board, and a helicopter will bring in a bomb squad. All this has been arranged by Mr. Pangalos personally. In the meantime, hunt for that bomb."

"Sir," shouted one crewman, "why can't we use the lifeboats?"

"We must make every effort to save the ship. If we haven't found the bomb by the time the rescue ship arrives, we'll evacuate. In the meantime, we'll search. That'll give us—" Nasoulia glanced at his wristwatch—"about three hours."

Costa stared down at the three sheets of paper. He was angry. And scared. There should have been more information.

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Bulging files on every member of the crew. Granted, the Pangalos headquarters could never anticipate that one of the men aboard the *Toltec Challenger* would turn into a saboteur and murderer, especially since these men were supposed to be the finest in the entire Group, but . . . but there should have been complete files on every crewman. That was standard policy.

Costa was willing to bet that some three-piece-suit man or woman in London was going to be looking for another job soon.

But enough. These thoughts were wasting his time, accomplishing nothing.

He lifted the first piece of paper and read:

VOGEL, WILHELM ALBERT, JR.
Level 2 tanker crewman
B.–20.7.46, Cuxhaven, FRG; ed 10 yrs; job exp dock wrkr, crewman, freighter, joined Group 5/72 Copenhagen.
Languages: German, Greek, English, Danish, some French, Arabic, and Spanish.
Emergency: Blood type A; no drug allergies; dependents 0; in event of death, contact Group HQ, London; Lutheran.
Job reports summary: strengths: leadership and mechanical, some chemical, languages/weaknesses: occasionally insubordinate; occasionally in trouble with police for fighting and destruction of property.
Leaves: 2/74, 7/78, 9/80, 7/81, 8/83, 4/84
Recommendation: adv Level 1 at discretion of captain.

Costa laid aside the sheet. Since he had served aboard the *Toltec Runner* with Vogel, there was nothing in the report summary that surprised him, even though he'd never had reason to see any part of Vogel's file before.

Costa examined the next sheet:

DOURIS, STYLIANOS POPOS
Level 4 tanker crewman
B.–12.4.48, Agyia, Greece; ed 8 yrs; job exp crewman, freighter, yacht, tankers, joined Group 4/76 Athens
Languages: Greek, English, some Bulgarian.
Emergency: Blood type O; allergy to penicillin and aspirin; dependents 3; in event of death, contact Group district office Athens; G.O.
Job reports summary: strengths: hard worker with strong sense of loyalty/ weaknesses: poorly educated, no special skills.
Leaves: 4/78, 2/79, 12/81,

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8/82, 12/82, 12/83
Recommendation: no adv immediate future

Except for the allergies to penicillin and aspirin and the fact that Douris had once worked on somebody's yacht, there was nothing in this report that surprised Costa, either.

He put aside Douris' sheet, and lifted that of Yorgo Kamatropoulos. He knew less about Kamatropoulos than he knew about Douris, certainly less than he knew about Vogel.

KAMATROPOULOS, YORGO
Level 4 tanker crewman
B.–12.12.50, Athens, Greece; ed grade and secondary, A.A. University of Athens, plus one year towards B.A. at same institution; job exp tanker crewman only, joined Group 6/74 Athens.

Languages: Greek, English, French, some Chinese.

Emergency: Blood type O; no allergies; dependents O; in event of death, contact Group district office Athens; no religious preference.

Job reports summary: strengths: intelligent, well-educated, takes charge easily/weaknesses: no mechanical or navigational skills.

Leaves: 4-5/78, 6-8/80, 6-9/83

Recommendation: captain's discretion for adv or not

Costa lifted the telephone receiver, putting him into contact with the still-manned Communications Center.

"Communications," said a voice.

"This is First Officer Minotis. If Captain Nasoulia or anyone else wants me, tell them I'll be talking to the sabotage suspects in Storage Room L."

"Yes, sir."

Costa glanced at the three file sheets once more. A cold shiver went up his spine. He replaced the sheets in their folders, placed the folders on the edge of his desk, and left the room.

Abdul Adr had once heard that the Savoy Grill served the most delicious food in London. Now he believed it. Even the lingering taste-numbness caused by his cigars couldn't kill the deliciousness of this food.

He was sure that Ahmed Panu thought the same. Panu was the chief representative of the Bahrain bankers who held the mortgages on the Pangalos empire. He was, at fifty-one, twenty years Adr's senior, a man of slow, careful movements, of sleepy olive eyes. Panu was also

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a man who didn't close his mouth while he ate, as the current racket coming from his face testified.

"I'm getting impatient," said Panu. "You've been telling us 'any day now' for several days."

"Don't worry so. It can't be long now. I stipulated to the man we have aboard that the ship must be blown up before it reached South Africa and offloaded its oil."

"How long before it reaches South Africa?"

Adr smiled broadly. "Only a matter of hours, friend."

"Meaning that—" Panu stopped, glanced around the room to make sure that they weren't being observed, then resumed: "Meaning that the *Toltec Challenger* will be destroyed today?"

"Precisely."

Panu smiled, also.

Costa hesitated momentarily before he unlocked the door to Storage Room L. But only momentarily. He knew what had to be done.

He swung the door open. The three suspects stood. Costa walked in, closed the door behind him.

"How's the search going, sir?" asked Vogel.

"I don't know. That's not my department at the moment." Costa looked at Vogel, then at Douris, then at Kamatropoulos. None of the men looked more nervous or apprehensive than the others. "I want to ask each of you," said Costa, "one question."

Kamatropoulos smiled. "A trick question, sir?"

"One that'll reveal the saboteur?" asked Douris.

All three suspects chuckled uneasily. Costa did not.

"I'll ask you first, Wilhelm," said the First Officer.

"Sure," said Vogel. "Shoot."

"If you were the captain of this ship, would you continue the search or would you order everyone into the lifeboats?" Costa lifted his left wrist and glanced at the time. "Captain Nasoulia doesn't intend to abandon ship until the rescue ship arrives, and that will be another two and a half hours now."

Vogel thought about it a few seconds, and while he did he rubbed the stubble on his right cheek and his jaw. "I'd order everyone into the lifeboats," he said at last. "Abandon ship immediately."

"I'm surprised, Wilhelm. You've always been a fighter."

"True, sir. But this isn't something we can fight."

"So you would just leave a six hundred million dollar ship out in the middle of the ocean without making any further effort to save it."

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"Right," said Vogel. "Mind you, I'd hate to do it, sir. I mean, it is the largest ship ever to grace the waters of this world. But the lives of fifty crewmen and a number of women and journalists and observers aboard outweigh any monetary consideration."

"And you would abandon it immediately?" asked Costa. "Without any delay?"

"Right. I would forget about trying to find the bomb and leave immediately and quickly. That is to say, sir, I would get as far away from this ship as I could, as fast as I could."

"I see," said Costa. "And what about you, Yorgo?"

"I disagree with Wilhelm. I would stay and search."

"For how long?"

"At least until the rescue ships arrived. The chances are that the bomb isn't set to go off for a while and—"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because there would be too little time for the saboteur to escape."

Costa smiled. "How is he going to escape, Yorgo? It's a hundred foot drop from the railing to the sea. The lifeboats require a team effort to lower them. How is one man going to get off this ship alive all by himself?"

Kamatropoulos thought it over a minute, then shrugged.

Costa looked at Douris. "Stylianos, what do you think?"

"I agree with Wilhelm," he said. "I would abandon the ship without delay and get as far away from it as possible."

"Without waiting for the rescue ship?"

"Yes."

"You realize, of course, that our lifeboats could be swamped by the waves, whereas the rescue ship is a large vessel, entirely safe."

"Yes."

"But still you would hurry overboard in the lifeboats?"

"Yes."

Costa turned, opened the door to the corridor, stepped out, locked the door, and began to run. He had to reach Nasoulia as soon as possible. He could've phoned through the Communications Center, but he had to tell him eyeball-to-eyeball, so the captain would understand fully.

Time had run out.

Nasoulia was standing at the edge of the engine area above the nuclear power plant, watching the progress of the search. He slowly became aware of a large group standing a hundred feet away. Giscaret and eight other men were there, talking to each other.

It suddenly dawned upon Nasoulia that they must have found the bomb. Giscaret wasn't a man to waste time. Not in these

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circumstances. For the first time in years Nasoulia forgot dignity and broke into a run.

He was still twenty feet from the men when he shouted: "Where was it?"

Nobody answered. Instead, the men looked over at him, then at each other. They appeared to be confused, as though they didn't understand his question. Nasoulia, hollow in his stomach, stopped running.

"Did you find the bomb?" he asked Giscaret.

"No, captain."

"Then why the bloody hell are you just standing here talking?"

"Because," said Giscaret, "the search of the obvious places is completed. We have looked at all the readily accessible places, all the places near the Engine Control Room, and we've found nothing. The bomb cannot be found."

"But there are plenty of other places to look. You couldn't have searched the entire power plant."

"Of course not. But we've looked in all the places that can be gotten to without trouble. The other places will take too long to search. Perhaps the saboteur opened a large pipe, shoved the bomb deep into it so that it would be out of sight unless the pipe was opened and carefully examined with a flashlight. Perhaps he removed a ceiling panel and—"

"Forget the damn theories. Work on them and find the bomb!"

"Captain, to check these generally inaccessible places would take weeks. If there is a bomb aboard and it is a time bomb, there isn't enough time."

"As captain, that decision is mine."

"*Oui,* it is. If you tell us to resume looking, we shall. But as chief engineer I must tell you that the chances of our finding the bomb during the next several hours are probably one in a million. And as a simple engineer I can tell you that it's unlikely that a time bomb will allow for twelve hours, let alone twenty-four."

At that moment Costa Minotis entered the engine area in a hurry. Nasoulia realized something was happening when everyone in front of him took their eyes off him and looked past his shoulder. He turned to see Minotis closing the distance quickly.

Minotis stopped before Nasoulia, took several seconds to try (unsuccessfully) to catch a little of his breath, and then said: "We've got to abandon ship immediately."

"So I'm told," replied Nasoulia. "What's your reason for not wanting to wait for the rescue ship."

"The saboteur told me we

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should leave the ship now and get as far away from it as we can, as fast as we can."

"One of the suspects has confessed?" demanded Nasoulia.

"No."

"Then how—"

"When I read over the records of the three men, I realized who the saboteur had to be. Then I asked him and the other two whether we should leave now or wait for the rescue ship. He was one of the men who said leave now."

"Naturally. If we leave now, there's no chance that we'll find his bomb. He's not going to advise us to continue searching for it. The saboteur, you'll remember, doesn't want us to find it, Costa."

Costa ignored the sarcasm. "I believe the man, sir. There isn't time to hunt. The bomb will go off before the rescue ship reaches us."

"Who is the saboteur?"

"Stylianos Douris."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I can *make* him tell us where the bomb is."

"I doubt it, sir. He has a strong reason for wanting to see this ship blown up. Perhaps you could crack him, by torture or something, but not in time. He'll hold out as long as he can. Even if you force him to talk, he'll probably gain more time by lying."

Nasoulia thought it over. "All right," he said. "We'll abandon ship. Everyone except Douris. We'll leave him aboard. If the ship blows up, he blows up with it. If he wants to live, he'll disengage the bomb."

"You can't do that," said Costa.

"I'm the captain and I can bloody well do anything I want!"

"There'll be an investigation afterward, sir. Even a captain is held responsible for—"

"Oh, never mind. Bring him along—under guard. I want two or three men holding onto him all the time. He'll have charges to answer when this thing is over."

"Why?" asked Giscaret. "Why did he do it?"

"Someone is forcing him to do it. They've taken his family hostage. He either blows up the ship or his family is killed."

"He told you that?"

"No. His file told me that. It carries no notation of mental illness or depression, no record of any grudge against the Pangalos Group or family or anyone aboard this ship. He's not suicidal, he wants us off so he's not anxious to kill everyone, so that's all that's left."

The explosion was so bright that it dimmed the sun.

Costa saw it from the lifeboat, as did the other men. First came a sharp yellow

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flash of light on the eastern horizon, then a great rolling mass of red, black, and watery white. Next came the sound, loud and sharp like a sonic boom multiplied fifty times, then continuous thunder.

Costa couldn't see any parts of the ship caught up in the mass of flame and smoke and water. The lifeboats were too far away, pulling farther away every second with the motors locked at full speed. But he knew that the bomb's explosion by itself hadn't caused the lighting up and the rolling smoke in the east, nor the earsplitting bang. No bomb except a nuclear one could be that big. Instead, the bomb's blast had penetrated into the tanks, causing the oil to explode.

"It's a hell of a way for the largest ship in history to meet its end," said Nasoulia. He was seated beside Costa at the rear of the boat.

"Yes."

"And so bloody young."

"One little bomb can sure do a lot of damage."

"Where could it have been, Costa? Where could Douris have hidden it?"

"You'd have to ask Giscaret."

"He said that there were many places that a saboteur could hide a bomb if he had the time and knowledge to do a really good job."

Costa, looking toward the east, thought that the black cloud above the water resembled a horse's head. "Stylianos must have more brains than the company has given him credit for."

"Where could he have hidden it?"

Costa decided not to answer again. If he did it would only encourage Nasoulia to continue talking that way. He didn't like the way the captain sounded. Nasoulia talked like a man who was guilty of something or one entering depression.

"I was so bloody proud of that ship," continued Nasoulia. "When I first heard that I'd be the captain of the largest ship in the world, I was—Well, you can imagine my feelings."

"Yes. Similar to mine, I guess, when I learned I was going to be the First Officer."

"But I failed her."

"It wasn't your fault that a saboteur got aboard. If fault could be assigned—and I doubt that it could—it would belong to people at headquarters."

Nasoulia was silent for a minute. Then he said: "Where could that bomb have been?"

Costa ignored the remark and looked to the west. "In a few hours we'll reach land," he said. "So will the other lifeboats. Then we can ask Stylianos personally."

"Too late."

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Costa thought that Nasoulia was still thinking about the ship. He worried about the depth of the captain's depression. He turned to look at the smoke again and saw that Nasoulia hadn't been referring to the ship when he said that it was too late.

In the east the ocean appeared abnormally high.

Costa stared open-mouthed at the distant water. He felt hollow in his stomach as he watched the eerie horizon.

One of the men behind him said: "Sir, on the horizon . . . That isn't . . . I mean . . ."

"Yes," said the captain. He sounded resigned to his fate. "It is. From the explosion."

Costa stood, cupped his hands over his mouth, and shouted to the men forward in the boat, who were looking west toward land instead of east toward the smoke: "Tidal wave!"

Everyone braced himself —and waited.

Everyone except Captain Nasoulia.

Nasoulia watched the rising ocean without a flicker of concern registering in his eyes. "Costa," he said easily. "There's one thing I've got to know."

"What?"

"How did you know that the saboteur was Douris?"

"All the men were sane, sir." Costa had difficulty talking because his mouth and throat were dry. Suddenly dry. "That left only the family-held-hostage scenario. Douris' file showed that he was a good team man."

"Meaning he should have been the last anyone tried to force into betrayal against his employer," said Nasoulia.

"No. Meaning he'd be ideal to recruit. Loyal to his family. And he was a good family man. His record showed that. Most crewmen take their leaves in summer or spring—after they have enough seniority to get long leaves and a choice of the seasons—but not Stylianos. His leaves were usually in December, the holidays."

"So he could be with his family," said Nasoulia.

"Yes." Costa whispered the word. He could barely breathe because of his fear. The ocean to the west was like a great blue mountain. It looked like it was only a few meters from the lifeboat, but it continued to come faster and faster, and never reached the lifeboat.

"But why not Kamatropoulos or Vogel?" asked Nasoulia, his voice still calm.

"Uh . . . Kamatropoulos and Vogel? Oh, yes, well . . . The records, sir . . . They showed . . ."

"What? What'd they show?"

"Huh?" The mountain of water grew and grew, and it roared like thunder. "Oh, yes.

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They, the records that is, listed the number of dependents that each man had. Kamatropoulos and Vogel had none; Stylianos Douris had three. He was the only man with a family."

"I see," said Nasoulia. "So that means—"

At that second the wave hit.

Abdul Adr left the London office of what had once been the Pangalos Tanker Group. It was damp, and even though it was afternoon a light fog enveloped the city. He began walking toward his hotel.

Adr had walked only a block when he suddenly felt that he was being followed. He looked over his shoulder and his blood ran cold.

Ten feet behind him was a man with a black beard whom he'd spotted watching him yesterday at an East End restaurant.

Adr turned and hurried on.

What next? He had few choices. The damp, foggy streets were crowded and he could see a bobby on the next block, but appealing for police protection was a bad idea for a man wanted by a dozen countries—including this one. No hope of outrunning him; the man looked younger and stronger than he. Little hope of losing him in the crowd; it was dense, but not dense enough for that.

Adr continued to hurry, to think. The only thing he could do was reach his hotel room and the Luger hidden inside his suitcase.

Who would want to kill him?

Several rival Palestinian groups.

Israeli agents.

Egyptian agents.

Lebanese agents.

Sudanese agents.

Moroccan agents.

American agents.

Rivals within the Crescent Moon.

Several personal enemies.

Adr rushed faster.

He looked over his shoulder again. And stopped. The man with the black beard was gone.

Adr then remembered an incident that had happened in London three years earlier. Again a strange man had followed him, and Adr had feared for his life. Then too he'd been pursued through the London fog by the stranger. Only that time the man had caught up with him.

"You're an Arab," the man had said without introductions.

"Yes," said Adr, waiting for a knife thrust or gun blast.

"Say, I got me an idea for a business, see, but I don't 'ave the money to get it started, see? If you'll put up the money, I'll let you 'ave a third interest."

"A—a business?"

"Yes. A new type of electric

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toothbrush, you see."

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Well, it's the Yanks, isn't it? I mean, in the States everybody uses electric toothbrushes, see. Well, my idea is to produce a new type of electric toothbrush. It'll 'ave a radio in it."

Yes, Adr remembered the incident well. And how angry the man became when Adr told him he wouldn't give him any money.

"That's the trouble with you people what got the money!" the man had shouted after him. "You want to keep it all for yourselves. You'll steal my idea! I know you will! If you do, I'll come after you!"

That was probably what the man with the black beard was: another Englishman wanting Arab money to make him rich. That was the trouble with the English, they didn't understand about thrift, enterprise, or trade. The Arabs understood those things. Their nations had become the richest in the world because of their understanding. Oh, sure, the oil resources had helped. But the English would have to learn those values if they ever wanted to amount to anything.

He continued walking toward his hotel. Unhurried now. For a few minutes he even enjoyed the fog. But only for a few minutes.

Halfway to his hotel he became uneasy again. But when he glanced over his shoulder he didn't see any faces that looked dangerous.

He didn't quicken his pace, but his feeling of unease and of being watched never left him as he walked to the hotel. He was sure that it was the man with the black beard even though he couldn't see him.

He wished he had the Luger with him. But that was impossible. Any bobby might stop and frisk him. As a foreigner his rights were limited. If the English suspected his identity, he wouldn't have any rights at all.

He thought that maybe he should go to a phone and ask the local Crescent Moon members for protection. But what would he say to justify such an alert? That a man he saw in a restaurant later turned up walking behind him? They would think he was cracking up.

Who? Who was he?

Enemy agent? Political rival? Personal enemy?

Maybe the brother or son or cousin of someone he'd killed or ordered killed?

How many people had he ordered killed?

About seventy had died in his largest hit, the *Toltec Challenger*. About fifty crewmen and twenty wives of crewmen, journalists, and civilian observers.

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No one knew the exact toll. No one knew exactly how many non-crewmen had been aboard. And several crewmen had survived.

Douris wasn't one of them.

Or, if he was, no one realized that he was still alive. He could have gotten to shore by clinging to debris and swimming the way other crewmen had, then not reported his survival to the authorities.

No!

Douris was dead! As dead as his wife and twins!

All dead!

All!

Suddenly Adr heard footsteps behind him, paced identically to his own. Someone was following him. Maybe the man with the black beard. How many of his enemies had black hair? Did Douris?

Adr started to glance over his shoulder, but abruptly his fear seized control of every cell of his body. He couldn't look. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't think.

He ran.

People turned and looked at him running but he didn't care.

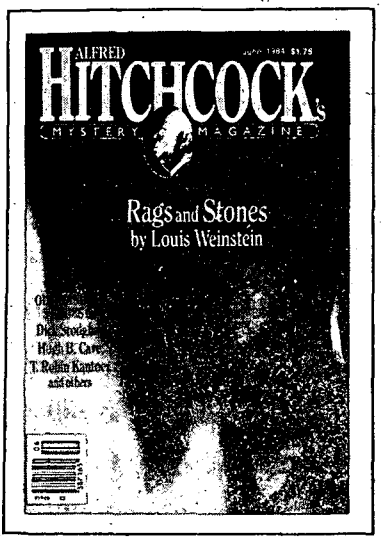
He had to get away.

He could hear someone running behind him, the footfalls in time with his own.

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UNSOLVED

by
Roger Hufford

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: It's probably best to set aside any other version you may have read of this story when working this puzzle.)

The answer will appear in the September issue.

Everything was perfect in the Garden of Eden, until one day somebody ate an apple from the tree of knowledge. The immediate result was that you could no longer trust people to tell the truth. In fact, when the residents were questioned about the event, only one of them answered all the questions truthfully. All the others told some lies, though no two of them told the same number of lies.

Adam
1. The snake ate the apple.
2. The snake was in the garden.
3. Eve has not weeded the garden.
4. Abel failed to do his chores.

Eve
5. Adam ate the apple.
6. We are not all equally truthful.
7. I was out weeding the garden.
8. The snake lies.

Cain
9. Abel ate the apple.
10. Abel doesn't always tell the truth.
11. Mother has always preferred Abel.
12. The snake never lies.

Abel
13. Cain ate the apple.
14. The snake can't see over the hedge.
15. I have done my chores.
16. The snake ate the apple.

Snake
17. I was not in the garden.
18. Eve ate the apple.
19. Cain is Eve's favorite son.
20. I can't see over the hedge.

Who ate the apple?

See page 112 for the solution to the July puzzle.

"The Garden of Eden," taken from Challenging Puzzles in Logic *by Roger Hufford. Copyright © 1982 by Roger Hufford. Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.*

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FICTION

Talking Is Better

by Esther J. Holt



Claudia knew when she got back to her place her plants would be dying of thirst and neglect. She had been rushed to the hospital with an inflamed appendix just before they were due to be watered. Her friend Hedy had promised to look after them, but before she could she was called home. Her short note from her hometown said she had asked someone else to look in on them.

Riding in the taxi with her arm around a dish-garden from the women in the office, Claudia wondered if she could ask the driver to carry her bag to her sixth-floor apartment. Infection had set in in her incision, and she still felt very weak. There was no way she could carry her bag even to the elevator. When they reached their destination and the driver held out a hand for his money, she knew there was also no way she could get *him* to carry her bag. She was lucky he set it on the sidewalk.

"Here, let me." A long muscular arm took up the bag. She was

Illustration by Ray Lago

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about to protest loudly when the man grinned. He had a too-thin face, blue eyes, and wavy blond hair. "Six-oh-eight. Can you manage the plant? You are Claudia, aren't you?"

"I'm Claudia." He must be the one Hedy sent. "I didn't expect a welcoming committee."

"I thought you'd need help. I understand you've been very ill." He held the door open for her and actually put his arm under her elbow as they walked to the elevator. "My name is Win Schoefield. And you're Claudia Antonio. Pretty." He grinned down at her. Why hadn't Hedy mentioned him before? Probably keeping him to herself.

She didn't feel very pretty. Her black hair was in need of washing, and she had lost weight. Her tweed suit felt baggy.

The elevator doors opened, and Mrs. Trotter from 601 stepped out. She was an elderly little woman who had been one of Claudia's few visitors during her stay in the hospital. She greeted Claudia

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effusively. Then she looked askance at Claudia's companion.

"I see you're in good hands." An eyebrow shot up. Claudia knew that meant Mrs. Trotter was being tartly facetious.

"She sure is." Win Schoefield swept Claudia into the elevator and pushed the button for the sixth floor.

"How do you know Mrs. Trotter? Do you live in the building?"

"As a matter of fact, I just recently moved in. Here we are." The doors opened and he would have helped her to her door, but she eluded his hand. "Have your keys?"

She dug in her purse and gave them to him. He opened the door and swept her in. The first thing she saw when she made room for her new dish-garden was the healthy look of her many plants. Even the furniture looked good. Someone had been dusting.

He took her coat and purse and led her to the couch. She was somewhat disconcerted when he removed her shoes and lifted her feet to the couch.

"How about a cup of tea?"

"You don't have to." But she stopped protesting when he went into her tiny kitchen. "It's in the cupboard above the refrigerator."

"I know." She heard him clattering around in her kitchen and suddenly she was embarrassed. He had had time alone in her apartment for two weeks. How much did he know about her? How much had he pried? "It'll be ready in a minute."

She watched him prowling around her own special room. She had enhanced the furnishings with her own collection of "things" she found in thrift and secondhand shops. She had even found a near-Tiffany lamp.

"Did you dust for me, too?"

"I have to say honestly that it wasn't dusted until this morning. Then I thought I should do it before you came home." He sat on the edge of an easy chair. He had an open friendly grin.

"How did you know I'd be coming home today? I didn't know it until last night." Something was beginning to nag her, just a tiny pinprick at the back of her mind.

"I called the hospital. You didn't seem to have anyone to look after you. I didn't want you coming back to an empty place."

"Hedy would have been here if she could."

The expression on his face remained the same. Shouldn't he have shown some response to Hedy's name? If they were friends, shouldn't he say something about Hedy who helped everyone? Good old Hedy. A chill went down her spine and she shivered.

Just then the teakettle whistled.

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"Hot tea coming up," he said cheerfully ambling into the kitchen.

The telephone rang, and she made her way to the table to answer it.

"Hello."

"Is this 608?"

"Yes, it is."

"Is Win Schoefield there?"

"Yes, he is. Just a minute."

"Just tell him, the fink, to get himself down to the lobby where I can find him. I'll take it from there."

"Can I at least tell him who's calling?" Now the cold feeling extended to the pit of her stomach.

"We had a date this morning for him to bring me something and he ain't here. His jerky answering machine said he'd be in 608 all morning. You just tell him I'm waiting for my stuff."

"What stuff?"

"Don't be nosy, honey. He knows." The receiver slammed down.

Putting the receiver back she stood there, unable to move. He didn't know Hedy. Of that she was certain. Now some gravel-voiced stranger was down in the lobby wanting his "stuff." That could mean only one thing.

"I guess walking around is good for you." He came in carrying tea things on a tray and set it on the coffee table.

"Yes. That call was for you."

"Oh?" He frowned. "Did they leave a message?"

"Yes, you're to meet someone in the lobby with his stuff. He said you promised it would be delivered this morning." She watched for a guilty reaction.

"Oh, yeah." He hit the flat of his palm against his forehead. "I have it ready for him. I'll have to leave you and go take care of him."

His grin might have melted her if she didn't have the dire thoughts she had. When he was gone, she double-locked her door.

How could anyone so pleasant and helpful be dealing in "stuff"? She had felt an instant liking for him and wanted to know him better. That phone call had just changed her mind. She felt disappointed more than she had any right to be. She had only known him a few minutes.

The telephone rang again. Maybe it was Hedy.

It was another call for him. From a woman. With a hushed voice.

"Is Win there, please?"

"No, he just went down to the lobby. Why don't you call his

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number and leave a message on the machine? He should go back to his own place soon."

"He told me he'd be staying with you until after lunch. So he won't be back checking his machine. Just tell him Mitzi O.D.'d and I had to take her to the hospital."

"O.D.'d?" Now she could see horns growing out of his head. "Will he care?"

"Of course he'll care. Just tell him Ava called. I want him to go to the hospital with me."

"Do you think he will?" Claudia was beginning to feel as though she were still under the anesthetic.

"He has to. Mitzi misses him already."

"I'll tell him as soon as he comes. Goodbye." She hung up.

Through the door she'd tell him.

She thought about barricading the door, but that would have been too much. She checked the teapot and poured the contents down the drain. Then she made fresh tea in a different pot. Did he use kindness to get people hooked to add to his list of customers? Well, he had lost one today. She'd love to tell him so, but she was afraid to let him know she was onto him.

When the knock came, she almost bolted for the closet.

"Who is it?"

"Win."

"I don't need anything. But where is my mail?" Could he hear the quiver in her voice?

"Your mail is on the kitchen counter. I thought we could become better acquainted." He sounded puzzled.

"You had another call. From Ava. She wants you to go to the hospital to see Mitzi."

"Did she say Mitzi O.D.'d?"

"Yes."

"Drat. I have to go then. Ava must be about crazy. I'll see you later."

She heard him go away.

"No, you won't."

Taking the tea things back to the kitchen she noticed the skimpy stack of mail. She never got much, and in two weeks it had hardly piled up. One return address she noticed was the company that owned the building. Probably threatening to go condo or something. Well, she'd look at it later. She didn't want to worry right now.

She went into the bedroom to change into pajamas and robe. She had lived in hospital clothes for two weeks and thought she was

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well rid of them. Now she needed her own comfortable clothes.

What was she going to do? She had nothing she could tell the police. At least not enough to get him out of her hair. She'd just have to make it clear, without raising his suspicions, that she didn't need his services of any kind. She'd have to be very careful. And she was a person who couldn't keep Christmas gifts a secret.

Beginning to feel tired, she curled up on the couch. To be near the door so she could fend him off when he came back.

When the telephone rang again, she had to uncurl herself slowly to go to it.

"Schoefield's answering service."

"Claudia? Is that you? What kind of a way is that to answer the phone?"

"Oh, hi, Hedy. Just a private joke. Where are you? Still back home?"

"No. I just this minute got in. I thought I'd call and see if you got out yet."

"This morning."

"Oh. Good. I hope your plants are okay. The girl I gave the key to to go water them was in an accident. She broke her ankle. I'll get the key from her and bring it over. If you're up to company."

"I'd like some company. Some of the girls from the office came when I first went in, but I haven't seen anyone in the last four days. Don't bring me any chicken soup either." Knowing Hedy she would have—in cans.

"I'll be right there."

Claudia made her way back to the couch. Maybe the girl Hedy had given the key to had given it to Win Schoefield to do her job for her. Did Hedy's friend know what sort of a man he was? Did she care? Claudia knew for certain that Hedy didn't know the name. Luckily she wasn't connected to him.

When his knock came again, she was braced for it.

"I'm lying down."

"Good. I'll be back later then."

"You don't have to. My friend Hedy is back and she's on her way over."

"Whatever you say." He sounded slightly hurt. "But if you need anything—"

"I'll be fine."

He went away and she lay back. If only that attention and caring were genuine. She had liked his eyes and his smile—until she knew. Then she'd realized how false it was. And it hurt. To know

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she'd been taken in by him for even a few minutes.

"Dumb, Claud."

In spite of her mind going in circles she fell asleep.

When she wakened with a start, someone was knocking.

"Who is it?"

"Hedy. I tried your key, but you have your door double-locked. What's going on?"

Claudia unlocked the three locks and opened the door to her Scandinavian friend.

"I was resting. How did you get my key?" Pushing her hair back to neaten it, she went back to the couch. Fastidious Hedy went to get her brush and brushed Claudia's hair. "Thanks."

"I told you. I got it from my friend Jo. She's hobbling around on crutches. I think I'm a jinx or something."

"Now why would you say a thing like that? When only half your friends and relatives are down in bed." How did he get in? If this Jo had the key— "Did Jo say who she gave my key to?"

"No, I told you, or I think I did, she didn't give the key to anyone. She knew you wouldn't want someone neither of us knew prowling around. But the plants look great in spite of it." Hedy stood before the set of shelves holding her houseplants. "You did get someone, then."

"You could say that." How did he get in? And why her? Why pick on her to rope into his dirty business? She led a straight circumspect life. She didn't even go to questionable movies. Out of a city of millions, why her?

"I'm talking to you. If you don't want chicken soup, how about some fresh tea? And toast. I'll fix it."

"That would be nice."

Hedy went into the kitchen with the tea tray. Claudia could hear her in the refrigerator.

"Who stocked up for you? Your fridge's full," Hedy called.

"Mrs. Trotter must have gotten the key from the manager." But Mrs. Trotter would have let her know. Mrs. Trotter did not wait for her good deeds to be noticed. She pointed them out herself. "Don't bother with anything right now. I'm suddenly not hungry."

"Okay." Hedy came back and flopped in a chair. "I have to get going. I have my own unpacking to do. And I have to get back to work tomorrow. Will you be all right?"

"I'll be fine," she lied. "Call me when you get time."

"I'll be back on Saturday. Afternoon. My place needs cleaning. I wish I had a Mrs. Trotter in my building."

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Hedy gathered her jacket around her and went to the door. She opened it on Win Schoefield carrying a covered pan. She turned to give Claudia a feline grin.

"Goodbye, Hedy," Claudia shooed at her. She didn't want to involve anyone else. Hedy scooted out.

And Win Schoefield had come in. He grinned at her and carried the pan to the kitchen. Claudia felt trapped and helpless. She wasn't strong enough to fight for herself. Tears over her own weakness slid down her cheeks.

"I see you haven't opened your mail yet. There's one I think you should—hey, what's wrong? Have you been overdoing it?" Laying the envelopes aside, he sat beside her on the couch. His handkerchief came out to dry her eyes. She jerked her head backward. Rebuffed, he stood up and away from her. "Hey, I'm not a sex fiend or anything like that."

"Where did you get my key? How do you get in here all the time?" She was beginning to shout. That's what was needed. For someone to shout the roof down.

"I thought—I never realized." He looked stunned. "I'm your new landlord."

"Oh, sure you are."

She got up to go—where?—she didn't know.

"Here." He scrabbled through her meager pile of mail and handed her an envelope. "Read it." He handed it to her without moving closer.

One eye on him, she read the letter from her landlords who were no longer her landlords. They had sold the building to another company headed by one Winfield Schoefield.

"Who else is in the company?"

"My brothers, my father and mother, you'll love them, and two brothers-in-law."

Feeling very weak suddenly she returned to the couch.

"Why did Mrs. Trotter act the way she did when we met in the lobby?" She still wasn't convinced.

"She's the love of any landlord's life. She wants her apartment completely re-done, and I have to tell her no for the present." As if it were the most natural thing in the world, he went into her bedroom and came back with a blanket to tuck around her. "You stay put now. I'll go get your lunch."

"My lunch?"

"My mother made some beef and rice. Think you can eat it? She skimmed the fat. She does that for my father."

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"Your mother." He had a mother. And a father. All God's children had mothers and fathers.

"I told her we had a sick girl coming home today." He went to the kitchen. "I'll have it hot in no time."

For the second time that day she couldn't sort out her feelings. She had been so sure.

"Did you get your problem with the man in the lobby straightened out?"

"Oh, yeah. That's Mr. Zagretti on four. He said he'd do his own painting if we bought the paint. He expected to start this morning." His voice rose and fell as he moved about.

"He called you a fink." Her spirits were beginning to balloon.

"Mr. Zagretti is only five four—in all directions. He thinks he has to be tough. And as for Ava with the hushed voice—" he came to the doorway "—she's sixty with blue hair."

"What did Mitzi O.D. on?" She found herself smiling.

"Liver and onions. She's a dog. Ava O.D.'s her by indulging her. And since the two of them are alone, I have to be concerned." More than satisfied with her smile, he disappeared again.

"So you took care of my apartment because I'm alone."

"And got to know you through your plants, and your books and tapes." This time when he came he carried a steaming bowl of soup. "Eat this. You'll feel better."

"You have to give me equal time." She took the bowl eagerly. He tucked a napkin in the neck of her robe. His face was very close. She could smell his mild after-shave.

"To do what?"

"To get to know you. I could let you explore my place, but I think talking is better. We can dig deeper with talking."

He dropped into a chair facing her.

"Yes, talking is better."

She smiled at him. Someday she'd tell him about her wild imagination—when they could trust each other more.

He smiled back, watching her finish the last of the soup his mother had sent. She was so good with the herbs and spices no one ever suspected what else she had added. Soon, with enough of his mother's home cooking, there would be another name on the list. And when the whole building was under his control, the family would decide what to do next. This was their third apartment building so far.

"This soup is fantastic."

"I'll tell my mother you said that."

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FICTION



The Burglar Who Worked Back To Front

by Jeffry Scott

Illustration by George Thompson

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America is so vast and bewilderingly diverse that any generalization a visitor cares to make tends to be fair enough. But only as far as it goes—which is the short distance to a totally different state of affairs.

Nell and I learned that the hard way. Actually going to the U.S. stripped us of one prejudice or fallacy after another. Yet the element we'd dreaded, the cops-and-robbers, sudden death stuff of TV shows, was there all along, closer than we dreamed.

Even so, my abiding memories aren't of melodrama. What lingers is a sense of unmeant treachery on our part. Hard to explain, but I'll try. . . .

Being offered the post of writer-in-residence at Marofak was a bombshell. Marofak sounds like convenience food for vegetarians, but it is a brand-new college, a seat of learning whose upholstery still smells of the showroom.

Apart from army conscript service in Malaya ("see the world, get shot"), I'd never been outside Great Britain. My wife was a veteran of a least three day-trips across the English Channel, plundering French hypermarkets with her coffee-morning chums.

Conditioned by newspapers and TV, Nell and I pictured the States as offering confrontations with materialistic ninnies, psychobabbling surfies from California who were slaves to weird philosophical-religious fads, and legions of street crazies who would cry "Have a nice day" even as they mugged us.

It wasn't a bit like that.

We never meant to go. But naturally we mentioned the offer in our next phone call to brother Ted, who has lived in New York since 1970. The next thing we knew, his wife Mary-Jo (yes, she's a native) was telling us that she'd checked out Marofak and we'd be mad not to give the experience a try. "The campus is kinda tacky, concrete-brutal, you know? But I've rented you this darling little house up in the woods, half an hour away," she said blithely.

As a class, American matrons have flaws, but lack of energy and initiative—I'm too polite to allege inbred bossiness—are not among them.

We spent little more than seventy-two hours with Ted and Mary-Jo, since the semester (see how easy a second language can be?) was about to begin. Secretly, we weren't displeased because Manhattan, all high-octane glamor and squalor bursting out of the same human ant-heap, confirmed our country-cousin fears.

Then we took a blessedly clean, well-ordered train upstate to

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Tarston, nearest town to Marofak's campus. Nell dug me in the ribs as soon as we emerged from the station. "Johnny, it's *quaint*," she hissed, in a comical blend of delight and indignant surprise.

Quaint was the word, and it was the last one we'd expected to apply to the intimidating, decadent U.S. of A. Tarston had wide, sleepy, sun-dappled streets; its houses were small, mainly timber and weathered stone, overwhelmingly old. Had I dropped our big suitcase, it would have sounded like a grenade exploding.

Hank and Beverly Snow picked us up in their station wagon. They lived in their house year-round—a lot of homes outside town, in the woods, were summer places—and it showed. Their home was a treasure, just our sort of thing. A farmstead built, or at least begun, around 1810, lower story of roughly-dressed rocks and the next two clad in silvery-grey faded planks.

The Snows, having restored it lovingly, were touchingly grateful at lucking out with a pair of tame Brits who wouldn't rip them off or vandalize their nest. They were "doing Europe" for the rest of the year, showed us round in a hurry, and were fretting to make their plane.

Our perceptions of America were jarred when Nell asked Beverly Snow for the house keys. The young couple exchanged sheepish grins and finally located a bunch of keys in a dusty tin box in the basement. "One of us is always around," Hank explained, "so we've never bothered locking up. But if it'll make you feel better . . ."

So much for a crime-racked land.

Though imperceptible in detail, our conversion was widespread and swift. I soon noticed Nell using the long *a* in "tomato" and soon felt hard done by if the gravest fault in our car (we'd bought what we termed a banger and the locals a clunker) wasn't fixed in half a day. At home, it would have meant a week off the road.

Much of our free time was spent exploring. We seldom went far or saw anything spectacular, but they were genuine voyages of discovery. Despite the national average of a move every three years, the Tarston area had plenty of third-generation villagers with insights or memories to share.

One farmer told me he'd never been to the big city in his life. "You mean Washington," I suggested, and he looked nonplussed and said, "Naw, Gettysburg," which was all of thirty miles away and, while historic, isn't the biggest of communities.

Nell and I thought we knew Tarston, especially, like the backs of our hands. She even had a pet village idiot, a gentle scarecrow

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in clean rags who lurked beside the only filling station and solemnly presented her with wildflowers from our second meeting onwards.

We never realized that they really were villagers on British lines, despite obvious surface differences. Polite, genuinely friendly if you treated them right—but wary to outsiders.

That's what worsened the impact. We set off to a fantasy land, warmed to the reality, and felt the loss so much more when the whole thing went sour.

My duties at Marofak were pleasantly nominal, largely academic window dressing. I was an optional extra, a frill, like Olympic-sized swimming pools and the solaria on every floor of the halls of residence.

At first I worried about leaving Nell marooned at the house, but she threatened to divorce me if I dared rescue her, and I could see her point. From the edge of the clearing in which the house stood, the hillside dropped so steeply that it was nigh invisible. Look out of any window, and one might have been in an airship floating over pastoral scenery.

Two suspiciously fat stray cats, probably leading double lives, adopted us. Beverly Snow's flock of geese, if four deserve the term, had to be fed and tended. Campus colleagues were forever dropping in or inviting us to their barbecues and outings. Ted and Mary-Jo weekended once a month.

But the snag about idylls is that they tend to stop, if only so that one can recognize them as such.

I was in the hammock one Saturday morning when Nell came and stood beside me. Husbands will get the drift at once. Wives have a way of being there, making speech redundant, initially. The redundancy, like the idylls, never lasts. . . .

"What on earth made you buy this eyesore?" she demanded. Nell was being too kind in her verdict. Thrust at me was a vase about two feet high and pot-bellied in proportion; though proportion was a flattering word to use around such a grotesque. It had a glaring blue glaze shading off into the mauve hue found on drowned flesh, and a gilded riot of letters bragged that it was a souvenir of Point Pleasant, N.J., circa 1928.

I'd never clapped eyes on it before in my life. One would have remembered.

Now, Tarston was very strong on yard sales, and I proved a sucker for them. Inviting excess baggage charges from British

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Airways on our return, through snapping up scores of old books and several dubious bargains in the barometer and fumed-oak pipe-rack line. But I wasn't guilty of the Point Pleasant Horror—and told her so, loudly.

Nell didn't believe me. She'd just discovered the vase leering at her from a coffee table, and if I ever did that to her again . . . The atmosphere turned abrasive, Nell insisting that if I hadn't bought the hideous object, then I had found it banished to some cupboard and absent-mindedly promoted it to public life. In other words, I could opt for being a spendthrift Philistine or terminally forgetful; the happiest marriages include days like that.

"Well, it didn't just materialize," she snorted. No arguing with the statement.

I forgot the incident, but Nell did not. A couple of nights later she put her knitting aside and blurted out: "Somebody's sneaking in here while my back's turned."

"What, at this moment?" I asked, to be infuriating. The house was half a mile up a dead-end track off the highway, cathedral quiet; we were firmly on our own.

Nell clicked her tongue. "Don't be daft, Johnny. Somebody has been here, and more than once. You're out all day, I go for walks, they just bide their time and . . ." Illogically, we'd both lowered our voices.

She said: "I tumbled to it just now. That picture by the door, I meant to straighten it before Helen took me to the stores, but I forgot. Somebody's straightened it."

They had. "You never straighten pictures," said Nell. Which was true.

Then our eyes met and we chorused, as old partners will, "The vase!"

"Hang about," I objected immediately, "burglars take things. Not leave them, they aren't like the Tooth Fairy. Well, are they?" Despising myself for making light of it, because of the troublesome implications. Finding another temporary home, having to pay for this house as well, since Mary-Jo had signed a lease on our behalf.

I sensed that Nell had the same foresight. "Who said anything about a burglar, this is just somebody sneaking in." I didn't doubt that she was right. It may be a sexist view, but women do have an affinity with houses; some women, some houses, anyway. That's why they take burglaries so badly. If my wife said we had a problem, then it existed.

Nell pulled a face. "Hark at me, 'just somebody sneaking in.' Not

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to worry, if he ever showed his face, I'd knock seven bells out of him."

That wasn't nearly good enough, and we knew it. The house was isolated, if not exactly remote. And being strangers in a strange land, however hospitable, makes one unusually sensitive. We piled into the car and went looking for Chief of Police Cibber.

Mac Cibber was one of our best friends in town. I'd got off on the wrong foot by suggesting he must be kin to the eighteenth century poet, but Cibber was an enormously patient fellow as well as plain enormous, and that contretemps past, we got on fine.

Cibber, off-duty T-shirt emblazoned, "New England Is for Lovers," ushered us into his den, making Nell edgy. She hates firearms, and Cibber had vintage Winchester repeaters crossed over the dead fireplace. From another room came the lulling mumble of an ignored TV show—along with air-conditioning hums, the continent's prevailing domestic noise.

We explained about the suspected intruder and, after Nell nudged me fiercely, the vase episode, which struck me as too trivial to try on him.

But Chief Cibber leaned forward as soon as the saga began, with an expression—a twinkle—hinting he knew the outcome already. "Oh, that'll be H.O. Reeves," he said, in the sort of relieved tone one might use for, *"Oh, that'll have been the wind in the trees."*

He looked at us questioningly. "Come on, people, you know ol' H.O." Our puzzled denials amused him, though he seemed to be working rather hard on the chuckling. "Sure you do. Mrs. Glover, you're always chinning with H. O. while your husband gasses up the car, right? Your beau with the flowers, that's H. O. Reeves."

"My tramp!" Nell exclaimed. And I identified the emotion behind Chief Cibber's lightness: unease and a trace of resentment.

"He wasn't always a derelict," Cibber said shortly. "Had a good business and everything going for him when I shipped out for Nam in the sixties."

We were getting away from housebreaking, but Nell didn't mind. "What happened, Mac?"

"H. O.'s wife got murdered." Cibber, hearing himself being laconic, sighed and shifted. "Shot to death one afternoon, they never found the weapon, let alone the killer. Plenty of suspects, she catted around, anything in pants with five minutes to spare. Excuse me, Mrs. Glover."

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"Poor man, how awful." Nell glanced at me. "But why does he . . . well, prowl around where we live?"

"H.O. was the prime suspect," Cibber went on as if she hadn't spoken. "But he broke down, totally, when Charlie Prender—chief before me—went to H.O.'s office to break the news. It was like the shock of Dodi Reeves's dying that way shorted out half the circuits in his head. The thing was never solved. H.O. spent six, seven years in a mental hospital, and then he came home.

"Anyway, he has spells when he doesn't rightly know where he lives. Wanders in when it's quiet, and pockets this or that. Like those birds that snatch up shiny things and hide 'em.

"But then ol' H.O. comes to himself again, far as he ever can these days, realizes what he's done, and puts the stuff back. Uh . . . thing is, he doesn't always rightly recall where they belong." Cibber spread his hands, and his tone had been so wry, comical, that for us it was the finishing touch.

Nell giggled and I had to smile. Mac Cibber nodded. "Yeah," he agreed softly, "kind of droll; droll and sad."

The floor complained as he stood up. "Folks here are used to H.O.'s ways, and I'm sorry he threw a scare into you. Mr. Glover, take my word, H.O. wouldn't harm a fly. But I'll sure make him stay away from your place in the future."

Nell was anxious, regretful. "Don't be harsh, Mac. If I'd known it was him, and all the background, I wouldn't have let Johnny complain to you." Which was a bit rich.

"Just a talk," Mac Cibber assured her, with a wink to me over her head. "Now, nobody leaves my home without a drink."

We went out of our way to be nice to H.O. Reeves after that. Adding a dimension to the backwards burglary, since victims aren't supposed to feel slightly guilty for overreacting. (We never did discover who owned the Point Pleasant Horror, by the way.)

Hindsight made me understand that H.O. was younger than he looked. Shaggy grey hair to his shoulders, eroded features, desert-gully lines on his face added twenty years. But his grey eyes were as clear and innocent as a child's.

I'm afraid that I dined out on the story of our Looking Glass robber who left loot instead of taking it. Nell didn't like that; sometimes I caught her scanning the garden, wistfully, and divined that she hoped to see H.O. there.

The whole thing stopped being an anecdote one morning during

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my final month's tenure at the college. Shaving, I heard Nell cry out from the kitchen, pelted down with a faceful of foam, and finished the trip on my bottom, for the old stairs were ladder-steep and tricky.

Limping in, I felt my scalp prickle and my heart clenched for an instant. There's nothing more frightening than your partner acting crazily, without warning, in the tamest domestic setting.

She might have turned to stone, a knuckle jammed against her teeth, eyes wide, transfixed by something on the work surface by the sink, hidden by her back. For an instant I was certain that a snake had crawled in and was poised to strike, and then Nell started shaking. "Take it away, Johnny!" she blurted out.

It turned out to be a big handgun, an automatic. I assumed it was a Colt since it wasn't a Browning, which I'd have recognized from army days. The sun knocked sparks off the odd patch of nickel, but most of the steel was matte, with a patina of rust under thick dust. My Sherlock Holmes side concluded that it had been stowed away in two different places for a long while—somewhere damp, like a drain, then under floorboards or in a loft.

Nell's thing about firearms is understandable. She was nearly blinded in one eye as a kid, by some idiot cousin with an air pistol; then when she was a teenager, her favorite uncle shot himself. I think she'd have been less shaken if a snake *had* greeted her when she came down to squeeze the oranges and perk the coffee.

Angry as one generally is after a panic, I snapped, "It won't bite you, it's just a lump of tame metal." But she didn't want the thing within a mile of where she lived, and I wasn't throwing a possibly lethal toy into the bushes for children to find, or out in the garbage can, so we had a problem. Though not for long.

On the way to the campus, I stopped off in Tarston at the building shared by the police and fire departments. Chief Cibber, in full uniform, looked just as burly and even more impressive. My offering did not please him.

"Well, it certainly isn't mine," I said peevishly. Mollifying him a shade by explaining about Nell's reaction. Even so, the pistol lay on his blotter, rather nearer me, and Mac Cibber was making no move to pick it up.

"In England, we surrender things like this to the police," I said pointedly.

"Just junk," Cibber muttered, not looking at me.

"That may be, but I probably broke some law just carrying it here. *You* deal with it."

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"Yeah," he said heavily, not really addressing me. "Yeah. Go about your business, I'll take care of this."

Three days later, Nell cried out again. Jerked from my drowse, I got a muzzy impression of the local news bulletin on TV, waking fully at the sight of a face that disappeared from the screen almost before I recognized it.

That still photo, surely, had been of H.O. Reeves, looking his usual mixture of Away With the Pixies and Old Testament prophet. But now some honeyed oaf of a newsreader was burbling about the State Fair.

Nell said shakenly, "H.O. has been arrested. For killing his wife all those years ago. As if you can punish a . . . a poor *husk* like him."

She gripped my hand, lips trembling. "Johnny, supposing it was our fault?"

"I thought you'd be around," Chief Cibber greeted me. "No sweat, Mr. Glover, H.O.'s being processed away to the house with rubber rooms, and there'll be no trial as such. 'Unfit to plead,' they say in Jolly Old England, huh? So you won't have to testify, you can go home to London Town on schedule."

It was no time to point out that we live near Reading. "You know I'm not worried about that!"

"Sorry," said Cibber. "Kind of edgy, have been for days, we all feel bad about H.O."

I waited for more. He gave me an ambiguous look, then shrugged. "You saddled me with that piece, so I had to do things by the numbers. Sent the gun to the State Police lab, it's standard procedure. They stripped it and H.O. Reeves's prints came up: right thumb and two fingers, each side of the magazine."

"Hang on! I'm sure H.O. *found* the gun, nobody else would have dumped it on us. That means he handled it and left prints, but any good lawyer could—"

"Save it, Mr. Glover." Cibber opened a desk drawer and produced a newish looking automatic, deploying it to illustrate as he talked.

"This is the magazine, the thin, oblong box that slides in here at the butt. The one you brought in, the mag was rusted home, a thin crust at the base. Making a semi-airtight box, like a time capsule." He grinned sourly. "So . . . H.O.'s prints were set in a layer of grease that hadn't been disturbed since he loaded the piece,

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back in '62, to blow his good lady's head off. Kind of a fossil, waiting to be found.

"Those technicians cleaned the .45 and test-fired it, and the data went to the national computer archive. Bingo, three cherries in a row, there was a match with the slugs recovered from Mrs. Reeves."

I was still trying to take it in. "But he brought the gun to our house. You're saying he didn't know he'd killed his own wife with it?"

"Had to be that way." Cibber put the demo weapon away. "My guess is he shot the woman in a fit of rage, hid the gun, and planned to brazen things out, but then went over the edge, mental-wise.

"Deep memory led him back to the pistol later, and he stashed it some place else. H.O. did that, when his light-fingered spells were on. Later, he found it again, assumed that he'd stolen it, and tried to make amends, same as always, by returning it."

"Damn, damn." A sense of blundering guilt wasn't dispelled by reminding myself that I was agonizing over bringing a murderer to justice. Something in Cibber's face startled me. I stammered, "You knew he'd killed her, you knew all along!"

He might have been playing poker, eyes dull, face locked. "A hunch, maybe. Me, and everyone in town. Some human beings kill once in their lives and never will, can, again. I've arrested several, and it only means two lives destroyed instead of just the victim's. H.O. passed sentence on himself when his mind quit. Way I see it, he'd *been* punished."

Softening a fraction, Cibber said, "Look, nobody's to blame for turning the guy in. It should be done." Though he sounded less than totally convinced. "H.O. was finished, soon as he married that woman. Might as well be tidied away, all neat and final. Go home to your England, Mr. Glover."

SOLUTION TO THE JULY "UNSOLVED":

The material was a length of typewriter ribbon, the last few inches before the spool, and the letters were spaced so that the message in a forward direction alternated, letter by letter, with the continuation of the same message after the spool had automatically changed direction. So we read out this suggestive fragment: AT THE DOG AND PARTRIDGE SUNDAY NI.

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FICTION

The Occidental And Catfish Express



by Ron Butler

Illustration by Jim Ceribello

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I wasn't angry or offended when I walked into the supply room and found the associate director of our computer hardware company and the head of the secretarial staff in a passionate, clinging embrace. I wasn't even bothered by the fact that the smooch was on company time.

What did surprise me was that Masahige Goto and the tall and beautiful Keiko Namba had taken so long to get around to it.

"Sumimasen," I grinned. Excuse, please. "I'm out of paper clips."

Goto didn't look the least bit guilty; he puffed up like a pouter pigeon, his arm remaining around Miss Namba's slim waist. "We have," he announced, "decided to become man and wife."

"Married? Fantastic! Best of luck—and it's about time!"

Miss Namba, a proper young Japanese lady, covered her smile with a hand, blushing prettily. "We will want you to attend the wedding, Brent-san."

"Yes, of course," Goto added. "You and Noriko-san and naturally Mr. and Mrs. Ueki, and Yumiko."

"You going to rent an auditorium?" I laughed. The Sam Brent family included Noriko, my wife, the twins, Jotaro and Kenji, and Yumiko, the energetic and blunt woman in her eighties who lived with us as nanny, cook, and backstage director in running the house. Add Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki, my wife's father, and Hanako, my mother-in-law, and the list of guests already came to seven if I counted myself —which I definitely did.

Goto smoothed out his shirt front and adjusted his tie. "I think that we will have a small, simple ceremony with only good friends and close relatives."

"Sounds great. Set a date yet?"

"Go-gatsu," the bride-to-be said. May.

That was a month away—plenty of time, in my estimation, for them to get everything lined up and for me to throw a company shindig, and, possibly, a party or two at my home.

"Okay," I said with a smile, "but now it's time for me to resume earning a living."

Miss Namba and Goto went back to their work and I returned to my office, propped my feet on a corner of the desk, and reflected on how special these two people were to me. Goto had long been a close personal friend as well as a vital component in the successful management of the business, and had been courting Keiko steadily during the past few months, bringing her to my home several times. During the past few weeks, he had been showing all the symp-

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toms of a young man deeply in love.

I didn't blame him. Miss Namba was, in Sam Brent's catalogue of people worth knowing, near the top, a tall, slender woman who moved with an easy, unaffected feminine grace and who spoke with a quiet confidence. Although a number of men in the office had made their admiration known, she went about her life as if totally oblivious to the attraction she held for men.

When she first came to the company, she had learned quickly, soon taking over the demanding task of supervising and collating the massive flow of correspondence and converting it into data for computer storage.

Aside from Keiko's unquestioned competence, I won't deny that it was pleasing for the male ego to be able to look up from the monotony or the chaos of paperwork from time to time and relax in the presence of someone whose personality and appearance were so soothing. And I knew that Miss Namba and Goto, once married, would work even harder, a team doubling its efforts to repay a felt obligation to the source of their income.

I picked up the phone and buzzed Inspector Ueki and Noriko. I was doing my part to see that good news travels fast.

At noon that day, I met Ueki for lunch at what we had come to call "our place," a hole-in-the-wall yakitori restaurant where the food was good, inexpensive, and served piping hot from grill to counter by two white-hatted chefs who remembered the names and preferences of their customers. There were only twelve stools, but Japanese businessmen don't dawdle over their food and there was seldom a wait of more than a few minutes.

"What," the inspector asked as we watched the cooks spear chunks of chicken, eggplant, and onions on bamboo skewers, "do you have in mind by way of wedding gifts for Goto and Miss Namba?"

I took an appreciative whiff of the goodies as they sizzled over glowing charcoal. "How about something to wear?"

"Clothes?" Ueki said, bands of incredulity in his tone. "I have never heard of clothes being presented to newlyweds."

"Well," I prevaricated, "I have—many times."

Ueki slid his chopsticks out of their paper covering and dug into a bowl of rice. "What kind of apparel, Sam?"

I waited while my lunch was dished up, rooting around in the old imagination for something to justify my impromptu suggestion. "I know for a fact that Goto's been looking a long

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time for imported American bluejeans, but he says they cost too much."

The inspector's chopsticks were suspended in midair, grains of rice dribbling back into the bowl.,

"Jeans? Sam, who would give dungarees on the occasion of a wedding?"

The best defense, so I've heard, is a vigorous offense. "If Goto is happy, he'll be a better husband, right? And what could make him happier than getting a good pair of jeans? Of course, Namba-san might not find them suitable attire for a woman, so we can check out kimonos—stuff like that."

Ueki laid his chopsticks down and took up a brochette loaded with steaming chicken livers. "Somehow, Sam, the idea does not seem right, but as I have none better, why not? Do you know where American jeans can be purchased in Okayama?"

It so happened that I did. There had been a blurb on TV the night before advertising the opening of a new import store—a bargain emporium, according to the announcer. "Leave it to me, Toshihiko, and we'll have the wedding presents wrapped and ready in no time at all."

We tilted our heads back for a sword-swallowing routine with what was left on the skewers, split the check, and ambled out into a warm and brilliant day.

It was not, by anyone's standards, an emporium, but a poorly lit cubbyhole of a store sandwiched in between an awninged tea shop and an overnight film developing franchise. The lone person inside would not have been out of place in a comedy takeoff on an unethical used car dealer—a man with a too-wide grin, hair that seemed to be groomed with axle grease, and dressed in a clash of blues, greens, and reds.

He bowed, rubbed his hands together briskly, and kept his grin on high until it dawned on him that I was a foreigner.

"American?" he asked.

I've never denied it yet.

"Ah! So good to have you here, but surely a person of your nationality would not be interested in bluejeans, a common commodity in your country. Fortunately, we have a selection of famous Swiss-made watches that are being offered at ridiculously low prices."

"Jeans," I insisted. "We want bluejeans for a friend. You don't care if we look, do you?"

He rubbed his hands again, less vigorously. "No, of course not. You will find that these are top-quality garments, genuine brand-name garments from your so-beautiful country, but the watches are a better buy. *Much.*"

We sorted through the clothing in wood bins. "What do you

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think, Sam?" the inspector asked. "I am not sure what will fit Goto-san."

"What I think, Toshihiko," I said in English, "is that this place is a rip-off." I held out a pair of jeans. "Look. The fabric is tissue thin, and the stitching doesn't come anywhere near being adequate for heavy wear. Also, get a load of this—the size is printed in centimeters on the inside of the waistband. I sure as heck never saw anything like that in the States. The label *looks* genuine, but that's all."

Ueki's eyes narrowed in a cold glint. Still clutching a pair of dungarees in his hand, he turned to the man on the other side of the bin. "I am interested in seeing one of those wristwatches."

"Hai!" the man said, indicating a counter. "But please handle them gently."

"Gently, is it?" Ueki used thumb and index finger as pincers, hoisted a watch by its gleaming stretch band—and rapped it sharply against a wall while the man with the slick hair sputtered protests. "I do not find it reasonable," Ueki said, "that a timepiece of such repute would yield its internal organs so readily. What is your name?"

"Sanzo Nosaka, if it is any of your concern, and I am going to call the police!"

"Are you, really?" Ueki said, unbuttoning his jacket and taking his ID from an inside pocket. "I am Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki, and you, Nosaka, are under arrest."

Nosaka started in the direction of the door, but I was faster, stretching out my arms to block it. Ueki brandished a set of handcuffs.

"Please," Nosaka said, eyes frantic, "I did not know the watches and jeans were fakes. I am new at the import business."

Ueki laughed and snapped the cuffs on. "I will be sure to tell the prosecutor that you were the first to say anything about fakes. I was arresting you on *suspicion* of dealing in spurious imports."

Then, with a snarl, Nosaka did two things he came to regret: he kicked Ueki in the shins and he mouthed a word that judicious people never use in the presence of a Japanese policeman.

"Poliko!"

It comes out sounding like portiko, and it's the rudest of rude terms, hovering in meaning between cop and pig.

Ueki's expression didn't change. Deliberately, he unlocked Nosaka's manacles, stood back, and bowed. "You had the courage to deliver a blow when I did not expect it. I regard that as a challenge. Are you pre-

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pared, Nosaka, to test your combat skills against mine?"

I expected Nosaka to back down, or to start screaming about police brutality; he did neither, kicking off his shoes and assuming a karate stance. "*Hai, poliko.* I am not afraid of you man-to-man. But, *poliko,* you have a weapon on your belt."

Ueki unholstered his revolver without taking his eyes from Nosaka and handed it to me. "Please hold this for a moment, Sam."

Nosaka attacked.

Inspector Ueki made a game of it, grinning as he lithely stepped under vicious shoulder-high kicks, always a finger's breadth away from Nosaka's slashing hands.

It was dazzling—as impressive a display of the martial arts as anyone could expect to see. I jiggled the revolver about, stuck a finger in the trigger guard, and twirled the gun faster and faster as the excitement mounted.

Then, as Ueki ended the uneven contest with three moves that looked like one, I somehow managed to discharge the revolver.

The result was a hole in my foot, and if there was any consolation in the enormity of my goof, it was in the fact that a bruised and battered Nosaka made the trip to the hospital in the same ambulance that took me.

"The wound is not serious," the emergency room doctor intoned, "but it will require stitching once I have it cleaned."

"Not serious! It hurts like blazes!"

"Hold on, Sam," Ueki said, "while I make some telephone calls."

The doctor held up an X-ray. "You are a lucky man, Mr. Brent. The projectile creased the bones of the first two toes instead of shattering them. A few millimeters one way or the other, and we would have been making major repairs."

I took the X-ray and peered at it, awed by the knowledge that my foot was filled with bones. Ueki came back and smiled at the nurse holding a porcelain tray with the items needed for suturing.

"Make those calls?" I said, shutting my eyes tightly so I wouldn't have to watch.

"Yes. I have been in touch with Noriko and assured her that you are expected to live."

"Thanks. What about Goto-san? Did you tell him I wouldn't be back in the office today?"

The doctor probed and swabbed. "I did," Ueki said, "but I will not repeat what he said about the probabilities of trouble when you and I venture out together."

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"Ouch!" The suturing was in progress.

"Sam," the inspector said before I could give more proof that my foot had nerves in it, "you will be interested in learning that my men have just informed me that Nosaka has agreed to cooperate with the police in the hope of inducing leniency from the court. He has implicated a number of other dishonest people who are selling imitation watches and jeans as the real thing."

I knew damned well what he was trying to do—take my attention away from the patching of my punctured foot. "Tell me about it," I said as gamely as possible.

"Usually," he said, "these items come from Hong Kong—cheap dungarees and inexpensive watch works placed in imitation cases. The people who dispose of them cheat the tax people and take the hard-earned income of unsuspecting citizens."

I bit off a yeow. "Glad you nailed the bum. But weren't you taking a risk by smashing that wristwatch before you were sure it was an El Cheapo?"

"*Ie,*" Ueki answered. No. "I was suspicious from the start. Nosaka was reluctant to have you look at the jeans, undoubtedly thinking that an American would be able to spot them for what they were. And, then, I also found it unlikely that anyone would offer an internationally famous timepiece for an absurd fraction of the ordinary cost."

"We are almost finished," the doctor said.

"Almost?" I wanted out of there.

"*Hai.* Almost." He jabbed my arm with a hypodermic. "A tetanus shot, Brent-san. It is a precaution in wounds like this."

The nurse moved to my side and took over. "Please allow me to help you stand up. Thank you so kindly. Now, if you will bend over slightly, you will soon be ready to leave."

"Antibiotics," explained the physician. Did I detect an incipient grin on his face? Embarrassed, I complied—and received the first of the unkind thrusts.

The second came after the nurse gave me a bamboo cane and a plastic bag containing one shoe and a sock. Ueki told me there would have to be an official inquiry into my accident. My first few steps on a thickly wrapped foot weren't made any easier by that news, but I should have expected it. Handguns are off limits to everyone but the police and the military in Japan, and for a civilian—especially a *foreign* civilian—to be mixed up with one was going to mean red tape, regardless of the circumstances.

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And, I assumed, Ueki also was going to find himself on the griddle for contributing to my delinquency.

"We're in hot water. Is that what you're telling me?" The corridor seemed to go on forever as I tap-tapped along with the cane.

"Not at all," Ueki said, slowing his pace to match mine. "My reputation, I say in all modesty, is firm enough to allow one small error in judgment, and Mayor Kawahara and my superiors are all aware of your character. The major difficulty, as I see it, is going to be explaining to Noriko—and Yumiko—how you came to put a bullet from my gun through your foot."

I rubbed my sore bottom. "Toshihiko, you can be a real pain, know that?"

Looking out at the line of taxis parked in front of the hospital, I found myself gripping the handle of the cane so hard my fingers ached—preparing to face the music.

The music awaiting me at home was of the sweet and tender kind, with a recurring motif of sympathy from Noriko. If anything, she said, she was prouder than ever of her husband and her father. What had taken place might be seen as a consequence of the dangers that accompanied police work—dangers sometimes unavoidably shared by a friend.

Yumiko, on the other hand, mumbled that my gun-blasted foot was the result of gross stupidity, but she was smiling when she said it, and a pleasant evening meal was followed by talk of weddings and mild suggestions that Miss Namba and Goto were deserving of more than bluejeans and a kimono, although, to be sure, it was so kind of me to be thinking of gifts on the very day their plans were announced.

I had a little trouble sleeping that night—the foot hurt and I had to fuss and worry with the futon cover before finding a comfortable position—but my tiredness in the morning evaporated with the arrival of our two newspapers, one in Japanese, the other in English.

Ueki and I were on the front page of both, and I had Noriko read the Japanese version twice. The inspector was quoted as saying that my wound, though regrettable, was an indication of the strong emotions that gripped me in the presence of a conflict between the forces of law and those of criminal mentalities.

"I am pleased," the quote went, "that Sam Brent felt so strongly about the need for right to prevail that he inadvertently pulled the trigger."

I called Ueki before he left

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home for headquarters and said that, after reading the papers, I felt like taking him to lunch—anywhere he pleased.

The inspector chuckled. "You will not feel like walking any distance on that foot yet, Sam, so let us wait. I think you should ask Noriko to prepare a box lunch so you can eat in the comfort of your office."

Noriko took pains to fix me the things I liked, then drove me to work, insisting that she go with me to lend support until I was seated at my desk. The rest of the morning also went well. Goto refrained from any notes of sarcasm, and Miss Namba made numerous trips into the office with green tea and small cakes.

Then, well before noon, the telephone rang. I picked it up.

"*Moshi, moshi,*" a man's voice said. Hello. "Do I have the honor of speaking to Mr. Sam Brent?"

"In person," I confirmed. "Who's this?"

"I am Shuichi Hoshino, Brent-san, and I operate a chain of travel agencies."

"Yeah, I think I've heard the name. But I'm not planning a trip."

Hoshino laughed politely. "On that point, Brent-san, I hope that you are wrong. You see, you are the recipient of a special award being made by my agency, and if it is convenient, could you come to my office later in the day?"

"Award? What for?"

"We are," he said, "naming you Honorary Citizen in light of your strong concern for law enforcement portrayed in the papers. To show our appreciation, my agency wants you to participate in a very special luxury trip being sponsored by myself and others in the private business sector."

Wow! I like to think of myself as modest, but . . . would it be proper to say no to such an offer? Wouldn't that be an affront to the values of politeness so sacred to the Japanese? As an American abroad, wasn't I an ambassador of good will, a representative of my people?

"I'll be there," I promised. "Two o'clock?"

"Excellent," he said. "I am looking forward to meeting you."

I took time out for a sip of tea and called Ueki. He told me that he knew Hoshino Travel by name, that it had, as far as he was aware, a good reputation, and that he, like me, was intrigued by the reference to a luxury trip. The conversation ended with his agreement to pick me up.

"You are going out with the inspector again so soon after the last mishap?" Goto said.

"Goto, old buddy," I countered with my best managerial tone of calm assurance, "what

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trouble could possibly come from stopping by a travel agency to receive an award?"

The gist of his muttered reply, as he left the office, was to the effect that there is no such entity as a free lunch.

Shuichi Hoshino ushered us into his private chambers as soon as I hobbled into the agency in front of Inspector Ueki. I had time, before we were seated there, to get my hopes up: the booking area was filled with posters of Tahiti, St. Moritz, the Riviera, of jumbo jets sailing the clear skies, of majestic ocean liners leaving wakes of ivory in azure seas.

Hoshino shook my hand and bowed to Ueki after the introduction ritual. He smiled diffidently and indicated the glass on his desk. "Something to drink, gentlemen? Whisky? Beer? Sake? I do wish you would join me, because I am extremely pleased to be in the company of a famous police inspector and a man who has demonstrated so much kinship with the law-abiding inhabitants of Okayama."

"Nothing for me, thank you," Ueki said. "I am on my lunch hour and must be back at headquarters soon."

"Think I'd better pass, too," I said. "I've got a lot of work left at the office."

Hoshino, a thin, balding man with a beaked nose, smiled apologetically. "Today has brought many business problems, so I am attempting to relax at what might appear to be an unconventional hour." He took his glass to what looked like an armoire in one corner and opened it. It was a well-stocked bar, glasses on a middle shelf, bottles on the top and bottom tiers. He went for the brandy, tossing it down neat. "I am quite interested in your work, Mr. Brent. Can you tell me how you like doing business in Japan?"

So, for the next few minutes, I talked about the ups and downs of my computer world, flattered by Hoshino's interest. We were interrupted several times by incoming calls, and I noted that Hoshino ended each of them with more to drink.

"Sorry," he said after the last call, "but everyone wants me to make snap decisions, and I find that annoying at best." He got a refill and sat down again on the upholstered sofa opposite ours. "I imagine, Mr. Brent, that you are curious about the trip I mentioned earlier."

"A little," I allowed. "But I should tell you that I really can't get away for more than a couple of weeks, and I'll need time for visas, getting the right currency—things like that."

Hoshino downed another two

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inches of brandy and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief. "Oh, this excursion will require one day only, Mr. Brent."

"One day?" I said. "Where can you go in one day?"

Hoshino got up and emptied Ueki's ashtray, cleaning it with a tissue before replacing it on the table, then made another trip to the liquor supply.

This time he kept pouring until the glass was full and retook his seat—a bit on the wobbly side, in my opinion. "Early next month," he continued, "the Japanese National Railway is making the first run of a newer version of the recently introduced luxury trains. You are, I assume, familiar with them?"

Who wasn't? Not content with mere speed, safety, and reliability, the Japanese had started a ritzy service that featured disco lounges, panorama coaches with windows extending from seats to ceiling, and European-style sleeping cars. Some of the private compartments were outfitted with stereo music systems and videotape TV.

But . . . trains? One of my assessments of life among the highly mobile Japanese people was that, on any given day, half of them were on trains. There are locals, longer-distance commuters, city-circlers, overnight sleepers with tatami floors, and the sleek bullet trains that link the major centers of commerce. There was seldom a week that I wasn't being whisked west from Okayama to Hiroshima or east to the fabled cities of Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, or Tokyo—wherever business took me. I couldn't work up any enthusiasm for another day on a train, no matter how fancy, but how to say no?

I didn't get the chance because, just then, a woman with extraordinary red hair opened the door and made a grand entrance, greeting me like a long-absent lover as I grasped my cane and came to my feet.

From time to time, one may see in Japan young women who dye their hair a henna red. The effect, I gather, is regarded as modishly different from the normal straight, lush, and shiny black Oriental hair. The color I was regarding at that moment, however, was neither close to henna nor the natural carrot-like hue of my own hair: it was that of a plump, thoroughly ripe strawberry.

The woman's facial features were accentuated by the use of makeup rarely observed in this part of the world: rouge, scarlet lipstick, a darkening of lashes and brows, and a bluish tint on the lids of the oblique dark eyes.

If this was atypically Japanese for her sex, so was her attire: spiked heels, a pale

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lavender pants suit, and a gamboge scarf knotted over a creamy eyelet border on the upper edge of her blouse.

And then—there was her behavior. She breezed past Hoshino, now bleary of eye as well as red of face, put one perfectly manicured hand on top of the one I was holding the cane with, and kissed me as I swam in a mixture of exotic perfume and disconcertedness.

"Sam Brent," she crooned. "At last, I have met a hero in the flesh, one who is so strong and handsome."

"Ueki," I sputtered, "that is, Inspector Ueki—this man here—is the guy who should get the hero's credit. All I did was shoot myself in the foot." Both her hands were now on my shoulders, and Ueki wasn't making any effort to conceal his grin.

Hoshino shifted his glass from one hand to the other. "My Naomi," he said thickly. "So beautiful, so beautiful, my wife." He raised the tumbler to his mouth and looked surprised when he found it empty.

"Naomi," I said feebly. "Interesting name. Did you know it's used in my country—in *other* countries—as well? Yeah, comes from the Old Testament. Not pronounced the same way, of course, but interesting, right?"

The smile that passed across her features could have been borrowed from Mona Lisa, but, from deep within, I thought I saw something of sadness in her eyes. "I trust that Shuichi has told you of the very special train outing," she said, standing so close I could feel her breath. "You will accept, will you not?"

I tried to back away politely; she moved closer. "Ah, I really don't think I have time. Business, you know."

She was still smiling, but her tone, when she replied, carried notes of what I took for forced cheer—or strained gaiety. "Oh, please think about it. I would be so disappointed if we did not have your company."

"Well . . . "

She ran her fingers across the lace trim of her blouse. "Among the other enticements, there will be some extremely influential businessmen aboard—and I think it would be a distinct advantage for your company to receive all of the publicity this privately-sponsored trip will generate. There will be reporters from the newspapers, wire services, and television, along with writers from our national magazines. Beyond that, Sam Brent, we will have with us famous chefs from Japan and Europe." She finally turned and faced the inspector. "We would expect Ueki-san to be with you, along with two other guests of your choice."

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Okay. If *Ueki* went, and considering the publicity—and *especially* considering what those chefs might turn out—why shouldn't I? "Would you, Toshihiko?" I asked.

Ueki contemplated an unopened pack of cigarettes. "I would not dream, in my wildest imagination, of allowing you to go without me. I am positive that I can arrange a day away from my duties."

Naomi clapped her hands in delight. "Shuichi will give you the detailed information. Shuichi?"

Her husband didn't answer; head lolling back on the sofa, he was snoring away lustily. "Oh," she said softly. "Well, never mind, he will be in touch later."

As we left, I glanced back long enough to see Naomi carefully remove the glass from Hoshino's hand.

At that moment, I didn't quite know what to make of either Hoshino or his wife. Before he passed the boundaries of reasonable drinking, Hoshino had been a friendly, likable man, one courteous to the extent that he saw that a guest's ashtray was kept clean, someone whose questions indicated a sincere interest in other people.

And Naomi? Oddly, she reminded me less of a vamp than of . . . what? A beautiful child, frightened but trying to hide her fears from the world? Flirtatious, yes, but in ways that left me confused. Hers was not the saucy and roguish charm of the gamin, and I couldn't bring myself to believe that she was an out-and-out coquette, satisfying her vanity by using her charms to snare male attention.

"Quite a woman," I eventually commented, "but at least she seems to be considerate of her husband and his, ah . . . excesses with drinking."

"Umm," said the inspector.

Fumbling with the cane, I backed into the passenger seat of his car. "I get the impression she'll be on that train."

"Yes," Ueki said, leaning on the horn as he pulled away from the curb. "I think so, too."

I got one of those little suspicions that cropped up from time to time in my association with the inspector. "Is that why you insisted on going with me, Toshihiko? Really! You know Noriko is the only gal for me, and besides, Naomi is a married woman and all that."

Ueki's laughter drowned out the traffic noises. "That may be, but Shuichi Hoshino is an obvious lush, and perhaps she is lonely for sober companionship. Anyway, Sam, I want to go only because a policeman rarely has an opportunity to travel in luxury."

I accepted that, and we agreed

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that Noriko and Mrs. Ueki would also be delighted to go. Yumiko could manage the boys on her own for such a short time.

"Sam," Noriko said that night, "I am so sorry that I cannot accompany you on the fifteenth of next month, but Mother and I have made plans to take the twins for a visit to my sister in Kagoshima that day, and Yumiko will be with us."

I wiggled the toes of my bandaged foot: some of the stiffness was gone. "I wish you could make it, love. What the heck do we do about the other two guests we're allowed?"

Noriko rearranged the plates of delicacies on the coffee table and put down a pillow for me to rest my foot on.

"Sam,were you not wondering what else to give Miss Namba and Goto-san aside from the pieces of silver we have agreed to buy?"

"Right! They can have one of those private rooms all to themselves on the train—wine, music, the whole bit!"

"Only if the wedding comes first," Noriko smiled. "Please ask them tomorrow if they have picked a day yet."

"I'll do better than that," I said. "I'm going to talk to Goto right now."

"May the third," Goto said when I called, adding with a sigh that it seemed a long way off.

"Great." I told him Noriko and Mrs. Ueki couldn't go, and that I thought it would make for a fabulous extended honeymoon, assuming that he and Keiko were going somewhere else first.

"I will ask Keiko," Goto said, "but I know that she will be pleased. Only . . . "

"What is it, Masahige? There's no cost—everything's on the house."

Goto waited for a moment before going on. "I was not concerned about the expenses, but was reminding myself of how often life has become hectic whenever I have gone places with you and the inspector. Do you believe this occasion will be an exception?"

I gave a hearty laugh.

"Scout's honor, my friend. We're going to do everything we can to make this a happily memorable time for you and Keiko."

"Hai," he said, sighing again before he hung up.

Still chuckling over Goto's needless anxiety, I returned to the family room and switched on the television for one of my favorite samurai shows. It had been preempted by a special newscast on a rash of passenger train accidents in the States.

I turned off the set and got ready for bed.

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The wedding preparations proved a pet theory of mine: the male of our species is the dreamer and compiler of abstractions, and the woman is the ultimate empiricist, the intuitive genius of the practical and necessary.

While Goto concocted visions of how the garden for their new house would be landscaped, Keiko made up lists of everyday items they would need to start a new household.

He speculated on the desirability of obtaining the smooth river pebbles favored by so many for garden pathways; she took him out to buy pots and pans. He wanted to buy stone lanterns of the kind found at shrines and temples; she brought up the subject of refrigerator, washer, and dryer. Should they, Goto asked, immediately open a special savings account for the education of the children who were sure to bless them? Yes, Keiko said with worlds of patient love, but we also must have a can opener and stoves to keep us warm in winter, and towels and bedding and slippers to keep on the entranceway rack.

Inspector Ueki and I did what we could to help Goto—we threw two dinner parties and kept up a steady barrage of encouragement.

The third day in May was gorgeous, adding to my sense of well-being as I dressed for the wedding. My bandages were off, and the day before, the inspector and I had survived the inquiry presided over by Superintendent of Police Mitsuo Nagasawa and attended by ranking police officers and Mayor Yukuo Kawahara.

The inquiry was more of a discussion than a grilling, and the upshot was a mild verbal reprimand for Ueki and a request for me to submit a *gomenasai* letter to City Hall; in the so-sorry, won't-happen-again note, I was to apologize for, one, holding a handgun when I knew I shouldn't, and, two, firing same into the terminal end of a lower extremity.

The comments and actions after the brief session salved whatever sting we might have felt: another written commendation for outstanding police work was added to Ueki's file, and Mayor Kawahara said that the press release on the outcome of the hearing would stress the positive aspects of my life and play down the unwitting bending of Japanese law.

Now, after a closer-than-usual shave with a new blade and the knotting of a tie that was double-checked by Noriko, I was ready to shepherd the family to the Shinto shrine where the nuptials would be held. We piled into our canary yellow car

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and headed out into the prefecture.

The inspector and Mrs. Ueki were mingling with other people by the gate when we arrived and walked over to help us with the boys. The fragrance of pine needles and the wind-borne scent of spring wildflowers were a relief after the city's stuffy air.

Before we ladled the waters of ritual purification over our hands from a stone cistern, Ueki locked his revolver and portable police radio in the trunk of his car.

"For this day," he smiled, "we can put thoughts of crime and violence aside."

"Well said." I took another deep breath of the clean mountain air and we entered the shrine.

Keiko knelt by Goto in front of an altar bearing offerings to Japan's old gods while a white-robed priest sat to one side on the spotless straw floor matting, eyes closed. Slightly behind the priest were three black-hatted musicians whose skilled fingers were versed in the ancient music of stringed instruments once played for the imperial courts.

Keiko, eyes lowered demurely, wore a resplendent silk gown in gold and umber patterns, her left hand resting lightly on the fingers of the right. Fitted over the steeply piled wedding wig was a broad white silk band, known as the *tsunu-kakushi,* or horn concealer. It was a symbolic promise to Goto that, once married, she would never don the horns of jealousy.

As Goto began to read from a stiff sheet of parchment, promising the gods to assume the responsibilities that go with marriage, something moved into the edge of my vision—a uniformed cop trying (I was certain) to get Ueki's attention.

The inspector, however, didn't see him, and I was not going to alert him to the unexpected presence—not now, no matter what might have come up.

The ceremony flowed into the *sansankudo*—the three-three, nine-times ritual. Keiko and Goto sipped sake three times each from three special cups of different sizes—nine times in all.

They were married.

The cop finally got Ueki's eye, and the inspector, scowling, went to him. Out of curiosity, I followed.

"What," the inspector said in low tones, "can be so important as to cause this intrusion?"

The officer bowed curtly. "There has been a stabbing and the victim asked for you specifically, refusing to speak to anyone else."

"Who is it, then?" Ueki asked.

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The policeman looked at the notebook in his hand. "A certain Mrs. Shuichi Hoshino. She will not allow herself to be taken to a hospital and is being treated by a physician who was at her home. He is the one who summoned the police."

Ueki looked back at the wedding scene and shook his head. "Very well, I will follow you there." He turned to me. "Sam, please apologize to the Gotos for me and, if you can find room in your car, take Hanako to the reception with you. I will be there after I look into this."

I stood in the shrine entranceway as Ueki and the officer walked down the winding gravel path. Beyond the red wood gate, I saw a fox slink out of a bamboo thicket, belly down. Stalking something? When the car engines exploded into life, it about-faced and disappeared into the shadows of the dense growth.

Who, I wondered as I went to tender congratulations, had gone after Naomi Hoshino—and why?

The wedding banquet at the Hotel of the Three Peacocks was going well, the guests and newlyweds relaxed as they sat crosslegged at a low, long table laden with food and drink. The sliding door of rice paper panels was open. When I saw Inspector Ueki approaching, I got up as unobtrusively as possible, stepped into one of the many pairs of slippers below the threshold, and joined him in the narrow corridor that connected other private dining rooms.

It took several minutes for Ueki to bring me up to date. After he arrived at the Hoshino home (he related), he found Naomi stretched out on a sofa while a doctor replaced items from his medical kit. The abdominal wound, according to the physician, was superficial. "She will not require additional treatment," he had said.

The inspector requested that the doctor wait outside while he asked Naomi to name her assailant and give the exact circumstances.

"There was no one else involved," she had insisted. "I was carrying a bronze letter opener to check the mail when I tripped and fell."

"Is it not strange," Ueki had said, "for someone to carry such an implement with the point directed at the body?"

"Unusual, yes," Naomi had agreed, "but that is what happened. I was careless, nothing more."

Ueki had looked around the room. On a stand that held a vase he spotted several letters and the opener. "And, after this mischance, you telephoned for the doctor? Why did he feel the

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police should be here?"

"I must have fainted after I called Dr. Yasukawa because he found me unconscious. When I learned what he had done, I asked for you, Inspector Ueki, as we have met before. This is not a criminal affair, Ueki-san, and I do not want the embarrassment of having it treated as such."

Ueki then interrogated the physician. "Your name is Yasukawa?"

"*Hai.* Masaki Yasukawa. I am personal physician to Mr. and Mrs. Hoshino."

"So. You told me Mrs. Hoshino's injury was minor. If that is the case, why did she lose consciousness?"

Dr. Yasukawa had looked away from the inspector, eyes taking in the flower beds around the house. "She has been under treatment for an illness, inspector, and the wound, while not great, was nevertheless painful. That, plus the shock, I believe, was sufficient to make her faint."

"And you, noting that she had been hurt, sent for us before she could explain?"

"Under the circumstances," Yasukawa had said, "it was a natural decision. Now, if you will pardon me, I have other patients who need me."

The merriment from the banquet room was increasing in volume, and several male voices joined in the singing of an old love ballad. I asked Ueki what his next step had been.

"I drove to Hoshino's office, Sam. He was drunk again, and I do not think he fully understood that his wife had suffered harm. I demanded to know his whereabouts earlier in the day, but all he could tell me was that several friends had stopped by the office and that they had been drinking together."

Ueki lighted a cigarette and I ducked into an empty dining chamber and filched an ashtray. "You suspected Shuichi Hoshino, Toshihiko? Why?"

"I do not know, really, except that my instinct tells me that something is wrong. I don't regard Naomi Hoshino as the type of person who faints at the loss of a little blood. What is your feeling about this, Sam?"

I tossed out a guess. "He's an alcoholic, Toshihiko, and she's a real looker—one who comes on pretty strongly to other men from what I've seen. Shuichi might have gone home after he got tanked up, quarreled with Naomi about her flirtatious ways, and then taken an angry swipe at her with the letter opener."

Ueki passed the ashtray back and forth between his hands. "The facts indicate otherwise. Hoshino's employees confirmed that he received visitors, that they drank together in his of-

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fice, and that he did not leave until I got there. Each visitor was identified by Hoshino's staff—they are all friends and business associates, men who also will be on that special train."

I moved out of the way as two serving women in kimonos came by with more trays for the wedding party. "Okay. Maybe one of them went to see Naomi after they left. Why not question everyone who was drinking with Shuichi?"

The inspector strode to the sliding door and gazed at the celebrants. "That is the problem, Sam. Unless Mrs. Hoshino is willing to press charges, I have no grounds for continuing the investigation."

I shucked off the slippers and stepped up onto the straw matting. "What the heck? If you assume she was telling the truth, you've got a perfect excuse to go in and enjoy the happier event of the day."

Ueki took the advice.

Naomi Hoshino came to my office a few days later, touching off a stir of looks and whispers as she marched through in a beige wraparound skirt and a frilly peasant blouse. Her makeup, down to the scarlet lipstick, was as vivid as it had been before, and she was still trailing the exotic perfume.

I greeted her politely, made sure the door was open, and said I hoped she was feeling better.

She seated herself on a sofa, crossed her legs, and took a pastel cigarette from a gold case, waiting for me to come around with matches before lighting up.

"I am concerned," she said, "that you and Inspector Ueki might have doubts about that little scratch I inflicted on myself. That is why I am here—to assure you that Shuichi and I are devoted to each other, and to ask you to please overlook his drinking habit. Shuichi is a decent man, Mr. Brent, but one who suffers from the constant strain of a competitive business, and I will tell you that he was very upset when he came home and discovered that I had cut myself."

"Sure," I said. "I'm glad you weren't hurt badly."

She smiled, moistening scarlet lips with her tongue. "In a way, I am guilty of the same order of misjudgment that resulted in your own recent injury, although I cannot pretend to have had a heroic excuse. I merely stumbled."

"As far as I'm concerned, Mrs. Hoshino, the matter's forgotten."

"Call me Naomi, please. And, as long as I am here, I think you might like to know the

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names of some of the other people who will be on the train with us."

She mentioned Kunio Ohara, an entrepreneur; Tomio Shioda, president of an electronic sound equipment firm; Masahi Sada, one of the designers of the train's interior and an old college friend of her husband's; and her physician, Dr. Yasukawa.

"Thanks for letting me know," I said. "They sound like interesting people."

Naomi stood up. "My husband and I want very much for you and your friends to enjoy the trip."

"Of course," I said, walking her to the door, "and I'm glad you came." But, as I watched the men in our company follow her out with their eyes, I asked myself if a glorious and unconventional woman like Naomi could go anywhere or do anything without creating a storm of emotions among those who contemplated her beauty, either yearning for it or envying it.

Noriko listened to my feelings of ambiguity that night and suggested it would be unfair to judge Naomi—to look for immoral or unethical nuances in her behavior because of her appearance or her forthrightness. "Is that not what some people in your country would call male chauvinism?" she asked with a mischievous smile.

I objected. "All I mean is that men have eyes for her; and she knows it—seems to encourage it. With a heavy boozer for a husband, that seems to be inviting trouble, especially if he's the jealous type."

"But," Noriko countered, stroking my temples with her finger tips, "there is no proof that either Naomi or Shuichi has done anything wrong. And, Sam, you often tell me that you are proud when other men comment on what you call my beauty."

"Yeah, well. That's different." I yanked the string on the fluorescent fixture above our bedding, letting the darkness conceal what might have been construed as a guilty—or foolish—look.

Masahige Goto and Keiko returned to work on the eleventh day of May. For their honeymoon, they'd gone island-hopping on the Inland Sea and now were living with Goto's parents until construction on their house was completed. Both were eager about the impending train trip, and we made arrangements to travel together with Inspector Ueki to Hiroshima, where the inaugural run would begin.

On the evening of the fourteenth, we assembled at Okayama Station carrying the blue plastic overnight bags provided

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by Hoshino Travel. The Hoshinos were waiting for us inside the main entrance, Shuichi sober and pleasant, and Naomi as stunning as ever in a shantung ensemble, skirt and jacket of emerald green, tucked blouse of delicate pink.

Our bullet train was nonstop, covering the distance in forty-five minutes, and the sun was already below the horizon, leaving bands of red and gold on the clouds above the hills surrounding the city, as we pulled into Hiroshima Station.

Two taxis took us to our *ryokan,* and after we had been shown to our rooms at the inn, we all went for a stroll under a gibbous moon of yellow gold, then dined at a restaurant famous for oxtail soup. Hoshino drank only hot black tea, and Naomi, throughout the meal, seemed uncharacteristically subdued, pleased to be in the presence of her husband and guests, but . . . reserved.

Naomi and Shuichi, I remarked to Ueki later as we took our futons from the wall closet and unrolled them, appeared to be getting along beautifully.

"For the time," he agreed, piling coins, cigarettes, and lighter on a short-legged table, "but with Mrs. Hoshino present, I doubt that the tranquillity will endure."

I dumped the contents of my shoulder bag on the tatami, then picked out my toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste. "Know what you are, Toshihiko? A born pessimist."

"Hai," he said, patting his pillow and crawling under the covers. "Either that or a sceptic born of experience."

I bet him five thousand yen the only unpleasantness we might encounter would be the result of eating too much food. He took me on.

It was a grand start from Hiroshima Station. Crepe bunting and banners rippled in a mild breeze, and while officials of the railway stood in solemn silence, a band played the hauntingly beautiful *Kimigayo,* the national anthem whose words are a hymn to the reign of emperors.

It was a sight to remember, as was Naomi Hoshino, who, on this spring morning, epitomized traditional Japanese womanhood. Standing a few paces behind her husband, eyes on her feet, she wore a dark kimono not unlike those brought out to greet relatives and friends on New Year's Day. The upper folds seemed like closed fingers caressing her slender neck, and, on this day, she had applied no cosmetics; her face was pale and naturally lovely.

Later, regular runs of the super service would involve seven coaches; this one had

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only four behind the powerful engine—the dining car, the lounge, the scenic-viewing coach, and the sleeper.

The doors closed with a pneumatic hiss, and we accelerated slowly from the station while the crowds along the platform waved and cheered. Then, at the invitation of Yukio Taniguchi, who was representing the national railway, we met in the lounge for introductions. In addition to the media people, the Gotos, Inspector Ueki, and myself, there were the Hoshinos; Ohara, the entrepreneur; the stereo manufacturer, Tomio Shioda; Dr. Yasukawa; and the train designer, Masahi Sada.

One man among the guests, Sada, appeared to be less interested in the features he had designed than in Naomi: when she spoke, he listened, and, whenever she looked in his direction, he flashed a smile. Attention like that, I thought, must be commonplace for her; she gave no sign that she was impressed by it.

Bottles of champagne were uncorked, and I joined in lustily with the others in a resounding toast, exercised my back with bows, pumped hands, and got a surprise from Taniguchi, the railway man. "Would you like to see the controls?" he asked. "As a computer man, you might be interested."

I asked Goto to guard my glass of bubbly and went forward for the inspection. It was worth seeing: power gauges, track-status readouts, a radiotelephone link to all stations, and a new satellite relay system that soon would automatically cut power on receipt of earthquake warnings. That system, I learned, was to be a backup to one that already cut juice to the trains whenever sensors detected jolts in the earth's crust.

Back in the lounge car, I noticed two things: Shuichi Hoshino was guzzling whisky along with the champagne—and Naomi was nowhere in sight.

"Where'd she go?" I asked as I rejoined Ueki and the Gotos.

Keiko, who was showing photos of the Inland Sea honeymoon stops to the inspector, smiled at me. "She and Dr. Yasukawa just went toward the rear of the train. They may be taking a tour."

Reasonable. I forgot about her, distracted by what Kunio Ohara, the entrepreneur, was doing—placing large, water-filled globes along the circular bar at one end of the car. In each, a whiskered fish swam about.

The reporters were crowding about; so did we. "This," Ohara said, "is the latest in home prediction for earthquakes." And then, while waiters in black

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bow ties and white jackets set breakfast trays out on the tables, Ohara gave his spiel, taking advantage, I assumed, of the free publicity.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government (Ohara said to refresh the reporters' memories) not long ago had experimented with this species of fish to see if behavioral changes were of scientific value in forecasting the quakes that occur on a daily basis in Japan. Scientists started their work on the basis of unofficial observations that catfish showed signs of agitation several days prior to big earth rumbles.

The conclusion, he said, smiling for the benefit of the portable TV cameras, was that a significant proportion of the sensor-rigged catfish did, in fact, provide a biological form of early warning. Because of this, Ohara reasoned, it was to the advantage of every family to have a home catfish. "Who," he asked, "cannot afford a simple bowl and a few fish?"

"But," one reporter inquired, "how will people know whether the particular fish they buy will do what it is supposed to?"

Ohara's grin made me think he had anticipated the question. "For a few yen, you obtain an interesting pet, and if it is sensitive to danger that looms in the future, so much the better!" He signaled to a bartender, who brought out another glass globe, filled with ice. These were not the cubes that come out of a plastic tray, but rough chips and fragments.

"Along with the catfish," Ohara went on, "I also have bought into a franchise that distributes pieces of authentic iceberg, obtained directly from the Arctic."

By now, I was standing back from the others, suffused with amusement. What I was witnessing was something dear to the Japanese heart, a heady elixir made of an equal love for capitalism and gimmicks. Was there, I wondered, anywhere else in the world where someone could make money by selling chopped-up iceberg, sold with the rumor that it made drinks taste better, or would decrease the likelihood of a hangover? And, granting the frequency of earthquakes in Old Nippon, I felt a surge of admiration for the Ohara fellow, who seemed to be having fun touting the catfish-prediction angle without making unfair claims.

Shuichi Hoshino interjected a sour note at that point, shouting demands for whisky to be poured over shards of iceberg. "I will test the product myself," he said thickly.

The reporters asked Ohara a few more questions, and Tomio Shioda moved into the publicity

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spotlight, presenting a short, effective sales speech on the advantages of his laser-beam stereo over what he termed the outmoded grooved record with a needle pickup. Shioda's second announcement, duly recorded in the reporters' notes and sound equipment, was that he was coming out with a new product that combined a wristwatch-size television with speakers that were sewn into coats and jackets. I'd heard of both separately before this, but Shioda's claim to fame was that his gizmo would allow one to shake, vibrate, and tingle to the sounds of one's favorite programs.

"Why are you laughing?" Ueki asked as he walked up to me.

"The Japanese way of business," I chuckled. "People in other countries write all kinds of academic books and articles trying to make Japanese business practices understandable to Westerners, and here it is, right in front of us, plain as the nose . . . "

"You are oversimplifying," Ueki said in a perfunctory manner, "unless you see things that remain hidden to me."

I added flesh to my comments: we were on a train operated by the Japanese National Railway, an economic arm of the government, that was being financed for this trip by private coin contributed by a travel agency, a successful promoter of fads, and a manufacturer who, in turn, were pulling in a lot of free advertising. The net result, in my view, was benefits for everyone in one big family.

Whatever Ueki's response might have been was cut off by the reappearance of Naomi Hoshino. Her face was no longer pale, but a pasty white. The man walking a few steps behind her, Dr. Masaki Yasukawa, stalked past us, hands clenched, pushed his way through the reporters and businessmen, and slapped Shuichi Hoshino hard enough to send him reeling against a swivel chair by a window.

"Drunkard!" the doctor shouted. "I should have known you would be drunk if we left you alone for even one minute!"

Ueki stepped in to separate them as Yasukawa raised his hand again, but it wasn't necessary: Naomi, who had been watching with a look of dismay, uttered a strangled cry and fell to the floor in a crumple of robes.

"Help me take her to her room!" Dr. Yasukawa ordered.

Questions would have to wait. Goto and Ueki helped me carry her. Dr. Yasukawa led up to her private compartment, pushed open the unlocked door, and directed us to place her on the bed which had been folded down from the wall.

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His black medical bag was on the floor by the stainless steel lavatory, and he quickly removed a stethoscope and bent over Naomi, listening intently while he also checked her pulse. "Inspector Ueki," he said without looking up, "will you please arrange for the train to be stopped and for an ambulance to meet us? The medication I gave her a few minutes ago is useless at this point."

"How urgent is it?" Ueki asked.

Dr. Yasukawa stood away from the bed. "She is dying of heart failure, and there is nothing that can be done here to save her."

I glanced down. Naomi Hoshino's bluish lips and taut, chalky skin were like a mask—a death mask. "Come on Goto-san," I said. "Let's see if we can help Toshihiko."

Yasukawa had one final word for us as we edged out of the compartment:

"Hurry!"

We were twenty minutes out of Kobe, the reporters were yammering away—and Shuichi Hoshino was screaming. "It is nothing, fools, nothing! She cannot be sick, only . . . trying to get attention!" He grabbed a bottle from the bar and upended it, amber liquid spilling down his chin, staining his shirt. Ueki tried to steady him, but Hoshino pushed him away, lurched to a wall panel, and started punching buttons.

The ceiling lights flickered and died as strobe lights and deafening disco music from gaudy jukeboxes transformed the lounge into eerie chaos.

"Dance!" Hoshino bellowed. "Drink and dance!"

Ueki seemed to be moving across a surreal landscape, face and limbs frozen, then jerking, in the harsh white bursts from the strobes. He shoved Hoshino into a chair and held him there. I was at the wall panel, experimenting with switches until I got the combination that cut the strident music and put the normal lighting back into operation.

Someone—one of the reporters?—coughed, and then Dr. Yasukawa entered the coach, steadying himself as the train made a minor change in direction at top velocity. "This is your doing, Shuichi," he said loudly enough for all to hear. "Because of your own sickness, Naomi may be dead soon."

Shuichi Hoshino's shoulders slumped and he began to cry, tears tracing lines down his face. "I didn't know that she was ill."

"You did not know," Yasukawa snapped, "only because you are seldom capable of perceiving anything through that haze of alcohol." Yasukawa

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shook his head in disgust and turned to the train's designer, Masahi Sada. "And you, Sada, took advantage of Shuichi's weakness and shamelessly pursued his wife!"

Sada drew his breath in sharply. "Slander!" he said. "I am a close family friend!"

"Was it friendship, then, that led you to slash out at another man's wife with a deadly instrument because she sneered at your treachery, worsening her condition and heaping additional grief on her head?"

Sada bulled a passage through the startled reporters. "Naomi is a bitch!" he snarled. "She feigns sickness to disguise a harlot's heart, and death is what she deserves! Painful death, and now!"

In the confusion, Ueki lost several seconds in plunging after Sada. I did my best to follow, but the train began to brake as it made the approach to Kobe, and I lost my struggle against the abrupt change in inertia, half-falling into the sleeping coach as we entered one of the long mountain tunnels outside the city.

Blackness shrouded the windows.

—

Our layover at Tokyo Station was supposed to be festive. It wasn't. The carefully prepared feast fizzled, our gloom spreading to the government officials who boarded the train. It was impossible to enjoy food—or much of anything else—with the memory of Kobe Station so fresh.

Naomi Hoshino had been rushed to open-heart surgery, and Shuichi, after collapsing, had been taken for emergency treatment at a center for alcoholics.

Sada was in jail on charges of assault and attempted murder. Inspector Ueki had found Sada in Naomi's sleeping compartment, with his hands around her throat. Ueki, knowing that Naomi was so near death, stilled him with a cracking chop to the back of the neck, adding a fractured vertebra to the designer's other woes.

Under the circumstances, we elected not to make the planned rounds through Tokyo's mazes of night entertainment, remaining on the train. Now, as we sat in the flower-decorated dining car, Dr. Yasukawa gave us the depressing account of the lives of Naomi and Shuichi Hoshino.

Naomi (he said) had been born with a congenital heart defect that wasn't diagnosed correctly until after she married Shuichi. She was afraid of dying during surgery, fearful of risking childbirth, and convinced that knowledge of her disease would increase Shui-

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chi's reliance on drink, which was already pronounced.

Instead, she had decided to become like the butterfly of spring, in beauty finding solace for the inevitable brevity of her life. The bright clothes and makeup, she thought, would hide her pallor, lending the outward appearance of health and vitality.

Keiko Goto grasped Masahige's hand, close to tears. "I can understand, but others did not."

"Hai," the doctor said. "Shuichi's continued drunkenness prevented him from guessing the truth, and there were some—like Sada—who interpreted Naomi's flight from death as an invitation."

"From what I have heard," Inspector Ueki spoke up, "Mrs. Hoshino must have spurned Sada on the day she was hurt."

Yasukawa sipped from a water glass. "That is so. She has always told me everything. Sada, as you know, was one of the 'friends' drinking with Hoshino in his office on the day in question. Once Shuichi was inebriated, Sada decided the time was ripe to press his desires. He went to Naomi's home, made some suggestive remarks about Shuichi being beyond care, and asked her to become his mistress. In a rage over the rejection, he took the letter opener and cut her sadistically, not, I think, wanting to kill her, but to impress on her the fact that he would not accept being turned away. Then, I imagine, he fled after she called me, warning her to say nothing."

"And did she faint, as she said?" Ueki asked, toying with a spoon.

"Only after Sada was gone," Yasukawa replied. "I did find her unconscious and called the police after noticing the wound, but, when she regained her senses, she begged me to help keep Sada's actions a secret. She was ashamed, Inspector Ueki, and worried that Shuichi, if he found out, would sink more deeply into his daily stupors."

"How come," I said, "you let her make this trip if she was so sick?"

"Because," he answered, "she insisted that the business advantages from the publicity were important to Shuichi. He had promised not to drink, and she believed her presence would help, contrary to my medical opinion."

Goto asked a question that also had occurred to me. "How serious is Hoshino-san's condition?"

The doctor's expression was grave. "The human body can take only so much abuse, and Shuichi has been an alcoholic for many years."

It was decided to undertake the return trip early, and I

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placed a call to Noriko in Kagoshima for some much-needed cheer.

At Nagoya, the next major station west of Tokyo, we got word of Naomi's fate: she'd come through the corrective surgery without complications and was expected to recover.

As we flashed by Kyoto at dusk, another stint at the telephone disclosed that Shuichi was responding well to preliminary treatment and had vowed to cooperate in the arduous task of weaning himself from alcohol.

The smiles and grins were widespread by the time we sped past Osaka, with Goto and Keiko going out of their way to tell me they were enjoying their second honeymoon, one they would be sure to tell their children about.

And then Dr. Yasukawa made a suggestion no one faulted. "There is, I believe, some champagne left in the lounge, and . . . well, I have never opposed anything done in moderation and good taste."

As the lights of Kobe receded, I was trying to foist my own name for the luxury train on the few reporters still with us.

"The Occidental and Catfish Express," I grinned. "It has a catchy ring, something the public will remember."

Ueki snorted. "The Western decor will be permanent, Sam, but" (he held his arms out in an all-encompassing gesture) "these bowls of fish undoubtedly will be removed."

"Why?" I wanted to know. "You can't really see much out the windows of a speeding train, so why not sit around waiting to find out if an earthquake's in the making? Heck, people could make bets on when they'd happen."

Ueki's smile, I thought, was vicious. "Speaking of bets, Sam, I recall that you wagered nothing unpleasant would happen on this trip—five thousand yen, to be exact."

I went through my wallet. "Smallest thing I've got is a ten."

Naturally, he had fives.

In time, and slowly at first, Naomi and Shuichi Hoshino rebuilt their lives. She was healed, and he stopped drinking, and, during their mutual recovery, they learned to depend on one another for sustaining strength. Naomi did not relinquish the clothing which her husband came to regard as bright and cheering, but the tones, tints, and dyes that come in bottles and jars were replaced eventually by what they felt was the natural and superior glow of health.

There was a day when they came to our home, graciously

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apologizing for past embarrassments. Noriko and I both welcomed them to our circle of friends, and soon they were frequent visitors. On one night when they were there together with the Uekis and Gotos, I was too involved in playing host to notice what should have been obvious.

Noriko pointed it out to me while we were alone in the kitchen preparing snacks. "Keiko Goto and Naomi are wearing the same kind of clothes tonight, Sam."

"Naw," I said, priding myself on my powers of observation. "Keiko's dress is blue, Naomi's brown."

"The colors," Noriko conceded, "are different, but the function is the same."

"What are you talking about, love? What function?"

"Both of them are wearing maternity dresses, Sam." She paused, smiling. "And I suppose this is a good time for me to tell you something."

I dropped a platter of boiled shrimp on the floor. "Noriko!"

She stood back, surveying the mess. "Sam, I only meant to say that I have decided on what presents to purchase for their babies."

We held each other in a moment of happy laughter, then returned to our friends.

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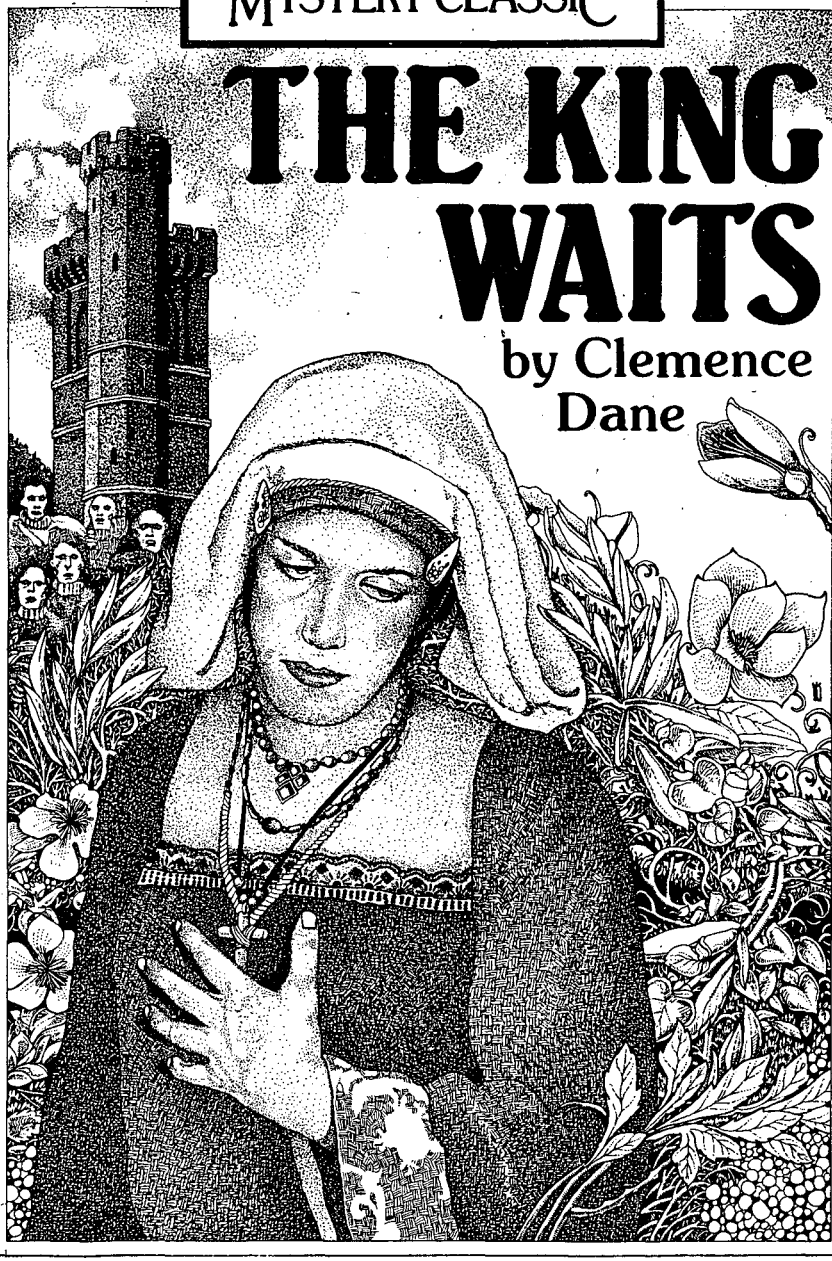


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The morning was a Friday, the month was May; it was the twenty-eighth year of the Eighth Henry's reign over England, and it needed five minutes to be noon. On Richmond Hill, under the great spring-leaved oak, stood Henry the King. His outstretched hand commanded silence, and his huntsmen stilled the restless coupled hounds in dumb show, with furtive, sidelong glances, fearing that outstretched jewel-laden hand, that arrogant glance. Who will disobey Harry the King, calling in that furious voice for silence? Even the midday sun, as a little cloud slipped from its face, poured down such an answering concentration of heat upon the green hillside that the noon hush seemed an act of grace from one royalty to another. There was instantly no sound at all save the panting of the half-throttled hounds and the dry whisper of innumerable caterpillars hissing in innumerable leaves; for there was a blight that spring in the oak-woods.

For one minute—two—three—the silence endured; then a burst of wind broke it: and all the trees in Richmond Park began once more to strain, creak, rustle, and the scent of the may drifted by again in gusts, and high overhead the clouds too renewed their voyage eastward through the heavenly blue. Over the Tower of London, as the wind lulled once more, they banked together again, a white tower of the sky.

Far below the scent of the white may drifted over the town and in through the windows, doorways, and courtyards of the Tower, and over the Tower green. Through slits in the wall the river sparkled in the noon sunshine; but still it lacked four minutes to be noon.

Across the green to the new scaffold came Anne the Queen, dressed in black damask with a white cape, and her hat was in the fashion. The Lieutenant of the Tower helped her to mount the steps. She had her glance and her nod for the waiting swordsman; then she looked down upon her friends and upon her enemies gathered close about her harsh death-bed; said to them that which was in her mind to say; adjusted her dress and freed the small neck; then knelt. But she would not let friend or enemy cover her eyes, and though she knelt she did not bow her head, but looked again keenly upon the silenced crowd: and for the last time called upon the ready blood to flush her cheeks.

She had always been able to redden thus into beauty when she chose; and now the hot blood did not fail her. It was at its old trick, brightening her black eyes: and this was ever the sign of crisis with her. With that sudden flush she had won her game—how

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often?—with this king and husband who had now beaten her. She felt a strange pang of longing to remember, to finger once again her glorious victories over time, absence, malice, envy, a queen, a cardinal, a king—and her own resentful heart.

She was not used to deny herself any wish; so, lifting her head, she let the spell work for the last time: and her executioner, meeting that full glance, hesitated and turned aside, as if his part were not yet ready to be played. Again he advanced: again she looked at him, and had the last triumph of her beauty as she won her respite. He would wait her pleasure for a minute, no more than a minute; but she knew now that the tales they had told of drowning men were true. The dying see their lives in a minute: she, dying, would see again her life.

She turned her eyes away from the frightened faces of her women, from faithful Mary Wyatt's weeping agony: she looked in turn upon her gaoler Kingston, on courteous Gwynn clutching in his hand her last gift, on thankless Cromwell, on Suffolk's exultant face. But here her glance checked, her very heart checked on its beat, for beside Suffolk, her enemy, stood a nearer enemy; it seemed to her that her husband's eyes glittered at her, set in a younger, comelier countenance. So Henry had sent his bastard to watch her die! She smiled to herself as she thought that it was like him, like her fool and tyrant, her Henry, husband, king! She thought that he himself would have been glad to watch her die: he could not for his dignity, so he sent his left-hand son, young Richmond. Yes, to act thus was like Henry, and young Richmond, watching her, was very like Henry: she had seen on many a May morning that eager parting of the full, pinched mouth, that glistening of small, hard eyes.

Suddenly her thirty-odd years of life began to speed across her eyeballs, quickly and softly, like the scudding clouds above her speeding over the Tower in the spring wind. Childhood and youth at Hever Castle—in a flash she saw those spring years pass, and herself journeying to France in the train of Henry's sister. Little thought fifteen-year-old Anne Boleyn that she would ever call the Queen of France sister! But she saw herself, nevertheless, all unconscious, dancing, dressing, laughing, learning, learning always to be a queen. And so home again to England, to the Court at Windsor Castle, like that last lone small cloud above her scudding across the sky to join the massed castles of the air. And there she saw herself for a little while serving the good dull Katharine; but she had no memory of Katharine's lord, Henry King of England.

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Another face and form flitted across her eyeballs, of another Henry—Henry Percy, heir to the dukedom of Northumberland.

A high wind drove in upon the clouds as she watched, and scattered them all ways, while the executioner whispered with his underling. Thus boisterously, she thought, had Henry the King driven in upon love and lovers. Henry Percy is rated by the butcher's son, Wolsey, the hated cardinal; and his father summoned; and shamed Anne is dismissed the Court.

Home again goes Anne to Hever, her marriage and her heart broken, and never knows, so innocent is this earlier Anne, why misfortune cut off her happiness at a blow, like a skilled swordsman striking off a queen's head. But when a guest arrived at Hever Castle—then Anne knows!

Henry the King comes to Hever very sure of his welcome. And indeed her father and her stepmother may scour the county for fish, flesh, fowl, and fruits in their season; and summon country gentlemen and ladies, and handsome boys and pleasant girls, to make feasts and plan pleasures for the king. But Maistresse Anne keeps her chamber. Henry is master of Hever, not of Anne. Anne knows now who has parted her, with Wolsey's help, from Henry Percy, true love, first love, and she will teach that greedy mouth, those glistening eyes, a lesson. Henry the King is the singular good lord and favorable prince of Sir Thomas and Lady Boleyn; but Maistresse Anne Boleyn keeps her chamber. Let the king learn what it means to part lovers! Let him wait and chafe and learn!

She watched him in memory once more as he rode away from Hever, an angry, hungry king, spurring his horse. She watched him and his train dwindling in the distance to such ant-like folk and swallowed up by young green and pure white may hedges, under just such a blue sky in just such windy weather. What a wind! There's no sound at all in the world but the hurry of the royal wind. When will it strike twelve? Is it a minute or a lifetime since she knelt?

More clouds scud across the sky, more years scud across her dying eyes. She saw again her father, and smiled as she remembered that he, too, had been among those who condemned her. Strange father! Coward father! But he had liked his new title, all those years ago—Viscount Rochford sounded well; and her sister's husband was glad enough to be Gentleman of the Privy Chamber; and for herself there was a place at Court again, and jewels! (But Henry Percy is exiled to Northumberland!) Once more she saw that greedy mouth; once more she fell very humbly on her knees, sum-

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moned the lovely blood to her cheek, and said her say to Henry the King:

"Your wife I cannot be, both in respect of mine own unworthiness, and also because you have a queen already. Your mistress I will not be."

And so home again to Hever in just such soft blue weather, to read humble letters from a once blustering king, who knows now what it means to be a lover parted from his love. How did his letter go?

"I beseech you earnestly to let me know your real mind as to the love between us. . . . If it does not please you to answer me in writing, let me know some place where I may have it by word of mouth; and I will go thither with all my heart. No more for fear of tiring you."

But he tires her nonetheless, and she will not go to meet him. Let him wait! Let him wait his four years!

They scud by like clouds, as her cheek burns with a new memory of hate and reckoning. What of Wolsey? How shall Wolsey be paid if Anne pines at Hever while the king waits unsatisfied?

So Anne Boleyn comes to town again and serves the queen again, and takes her place at last as king's bliss: queens it at Hampton, at Windsor, and at Greenwich, and holds her state in the cardinal's own York House. How else should Wolsey be taught what it is to part lovers? (But Henry Percy has married a wife and will not come again!) Let Wolsey learn what he has to pay for crossing "the foolish girl yonder in the Court."

She saw herself again, while Katharine, her mistress, sat weeping and praying and sewing with her dull maids, reigning at the feasts the shaken cardinal prepared for her; saw herself May Queen on May mornings and Lady of the Revels on Christmas Eves; till, at the Greenwich midnight masque, the French ambassador watching, she danced (mark it, butcher's son!) in public with the king, the flush upon her cheek, and listened afterwards to Henry's own song:—

The eagle force subdues each bird that flies:
What metal can resist the flaming fire?
Doth not the sun dazzle the clearest eyes,
And melt the ice and make the frost retire?

The ice, indeed, is melting, Lord Cardinal! You were not wise to go to France; less wise when you returned to dissuade a king from

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changing old queens for new. Anne Boleyn has other weapons than her brilliant eyes, her burning cheek, her dancing feet, and quick tongue. Henry has been jealous once; he shall be jealous again! King Henry is not the only lover who sings to Anne his own verses. Besides, Tom Wyatt has a look of Henry Percy (married, out of sight, never out of mind!), and is a bolder man than Percy.

She lived again through the day when Henry stole a ring from her finger and swaggered out to play at bowls with Wyatt. Again she watched all from her window, and heard all—King Henry crying out that he wins: and Wyatt telling him that, by his leave, it is not so!—and Henry's chuckle as he points with his new-ringed finger, crying:

"Wyatt, I tell thee, it is mine!"

But Wyatt, too, wears a keepsake under his Court suit over his heart. What can a poet and a lover do but draw from that hiding-place the jewel swinging on its chain.

"Give me leave to measure the cast with this, and I have good hopes yet it will be mine!"

Once again she saw him stoop, measure, and prove winner; and rise to face the Tudor thunderstorm.

"It may be so, but then I am deceived." And away storms Henry to her chamber crying—"What is Wyatt to you?"

She remembered how easily then she dealt with him and his jealousies: how she struck her bargain: and how, five years later, while she, the new-made Marchioness of Pembroke, sat on the king's knee, and he kissed her, not caring who saw, she heard Wyatt's voice singing to her new ladies-in-waiting his farewell song—

Forget not yet thine own approved,
The which so constant hath thee loved,
Whose steadfast faith has never moved;
Forget not yet!

Poor Tom Wyatt! The scent of the may drifts across the scaffold like the scent of the rose-water that it was his office to pour upon her hands on her coronation day. And there was another May morning to remember—the best to remember!

The flush on her cheek deepened, and her head sank as she saw herself three years ago, only three years ago, journeying to the Tower, this same Tower that now witnessed her last journey's end. She saw the press of cheering folk at Greenwich, the branches of

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the oaks cracking under the weight of citizens, the may-bushes clambered over, with gaping faces thrust out, scratched and red and laughable between the pure clots of bloom. She saw again the Lord Mayor and his scarlet haberdashers, and felt the jewels on his glove dent her fingers as she put her hand in his that he might lead her to the State barge.

It waited for her on the breast of the sparkling river, the same sparkling river sparkling now through slits in her prison walls. But then the river was alive with pageantry, and instead of black damask she wore cloth of gold; and the world was full of noise where now was deadly silence and the executioner's foot behind her, breaking the silence.

But her mind rejected utterly that stealthy sound: it was filled with memories of the glorious noises—the cries of all the people and the tinkling of the fluttering, bell-sewn flags as the barge poled out into mid-stream with fifty lesser barges following. All London moved that May morning with her towards the Tower, so that her progress turned the very Thames back upon its course. (Why not when she, Anne Boleyn, had already turned back history, shaken Spain, defeated Rome, killed a cardinal, and wrecked a queen?) The great fiery dragon spat fire from the foist, and from the bachelor barge came trumpet-calls once more, and, from the maiden's barge, unceasing high-pitched singing, sweet as the singing of the waking birds had been when she met Henry Percy, not Henry of England, by stealth under the Greenwich hawthorn trees. Well, she had avenged that lost sweetness! Wolsey had parted her from Henry Percy, and where was Wolsey now? fallen, as she was falling: dead, as she in another instant must lie dead! But Henry Percy had been gaoler to the great cardinal before the end, had led the cardinal, his legs bound beneath his horse's belly like any other felon, to his prison and his grave. She had taught the greatest man in England what it cost to part lovers.

A smile lit up her face as she remembered that lesson, and the watchers saw it and wondered, and weeping Mary Wyatt called her in her heart "saint" and "innocent"; and young Richmond thought of his father, waiting on Richmond Hill for the boom of the cannon, and wondered if he should report that inexplicable, triumphant smile. How slowly the man from Calais goes about his business! Look, he swings his sword! Does the kneeling creature know that the French executioner is swinging his sword?

But Anne did not see the present. She was smiling at her achieved past. She saw that she had done what she set out to do

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unafraid. She could say, when her sins rose up and looked at her, that she had never, in life or death, been made afraid. She had been fit mother for kings and queens: and—who knows? Wheels turn!—her Elizabeth might yet rule England, like her mother, unafraid! She saw again so clearly, lying open before her, the book of prophecies found once in her room, hidden there to frighten her by friends of Katharine. There had been a picture of Henry and weeping Katharine, and herself between them, kneeling at the block even as she knelt now. But when her frightened maid called out, "If this were prophesied of me, I would not have him, were he emperor!," she had answered—

"I am resolved to have him, that my issue may be royal, whatever may become of me."

She murmured the words again half aloud, and heard Mary's gasp from the scaffold foot—"She prays!" and saw the sudden upward flash of faces, watching a movement that she heard behind her but could not see. What? had so many years, had her whole life flashed before her eyes in so brief a minute? Yet the minute was too long, it seemed, for these watchers! They grew impatient and would hurry her into death. Let them know that the queen dies at her own minute, not at theirs! Not thus had they hurried her two years ago from Greenwich landing to the Tower. They had led her slowly to the Tower then, that all the town might see her beauty. And Henry, her king and husband, had met her in the gateway and welcomed her most joyfully. She felt again upon her lips his loving kiss, and his great arm flung about her neck.

It fell upon her neck again like an all-ending blow; and there was a booming in her ears. . . .

The echoes of the gun went rolling round and out over the Tower walls, went rolling over the city and its suburbs, went rolling with the river up to Richmond Hill. Henry the King, motionless beneath the oak, like a painted monarch, like a card-king of hearts, heard the heavy voice and understood the awaited, welcome message.

He started joyfully from his trance and, stripping a little ring from his finger, flung it into the bloom-laden may-thorn bush ten yards away.

"The deed is done!" cried Henry. "Uncouple the hounds and away!"

He clambered to his saddle while the statues of his huntsmen, his horses, and his hounds came to life about him, and, spurring his eager beast, led the hunt westward, ever westward, towards Wiltshire and Jane Seymour, and his wedding morrow.

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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Photo by Nawana, Exeter

ELIZABETH LEMARCHAND

Aggrieved orphans with long-held grudges, shy spinsters, balmy clerics, and opportunistic antiques dealers, art collectors, and garden-variety blackmailers —these are the characters who act as catalysts in the classical detective stories by British writer Elizabeth Lemarchand. Of course, there are the "good guys" as well: decent country people, for the most part, people who care about their fellow townspeople, are loyal to their loved ones, and are willing to offer assistance to the police when their community is struck by a criminal.

In *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* (edited by John M. Reilly, St. Martin's Press), Elizabeth Lemarchand reveals that she took up writing as a hobby during a convalescence. Her choice of detective fiction was a logical one: she enjoyed reading it herself. Her first book, *Death of an Old Girl,* was published in England in 1967 and has been followed by ten more novels, each as strong as the one before it. Lemarchand goes on to comment that the "formula" allows her to "concentrate on interesting settings and characters," which she does with great skill.

To wax enthusiastic over Lemarchand's characters and settings is not to denigrate her plots. They are wonderful. Clues abound, sub-plots (sometimes more intriguing than the main

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murder mystery) are neatly woven into the main story line, and the author—who never cheats the reader—often manages a truly surprising ending.

But it is indeed the characters and background that are most memorable. Tom Pollard and his sidekick Gregory Toye are Scotland Yard investigators who rise in the ranks as the series progresses. They are intelligent, compassionate, and devoted to hearth and home.

The two men are quite compatible. Toye respects Pollard's intuition, and he good-naturedly takes his superior's ribbing about his fascination with cars, and his tendency to play matchmaker while on a case. Neither of the two detectives is temperamental, eccentric, or macho. What they *are* is darned good policemen, and their phenomenal success rate with tough cases has given them a considerable reputation.

They are also excellent companions. They enter a town or village as strangers, usually days after a crime has been committed. Through their eyes we meet the inhabitants, spy out the lie of the land, and take the measure of the suspects. In *Nothing To Do with the Case,* we're shown how a close-knit village rallies during a fearsome fire in the "big house" during a traffic-stopping blizzard. *Buried in the Past* obviously refers to a corpse dumped in an archaeological dig, but it also refers to a clue that trips up a forger, an error found in a thousand-year-old town charter—even a suicide. *Change for the Worse* offers a murder in a Heritage-of-Britain house, open to the paying public for a special exhibition of local artwork; and the corpse in *Suddenly While Gardening* surprisingly pops up—a year after its murder—in a Celtic gravesite along the path Pollard is taking on his vacation. *Step in the Dark* takes us inside the Ramsden Literary and Scientific Society, an elegant library and club for scholars; and *The Affacombe Affair* features a private prep school for boys. An interest in art and archaeology, an eye for detail, and a gift for bringing the background to life—all these enhance Elizabeth Lemarchand's solid detective tales.

(Many of these titles are available in Walker British Mystery paperbacks at $2.95 each. *Buried in the Past* is a Bantam paperback, $2.25.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Elmore Leonard has a huge following; his latest in paperback, **52 Pick-Up,** shows the reason why. Harry Mitchell, a successful,

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self-made Detroit businessman, is kidnapped by three punks wearing masks. They show him a movie: a film of him romancing his young mistress. Naturally, they threaten to give the film to Mitchell's wife; he loves her, always has, and though the girl was a midlife crisis madness, the film would ruin his marriage. If that seems familiar, read on—and hold onto your seats. Because Leonard's hero fights back, and a dirty, dismal fight it is. The punks turn out to be psychos in disguise, so the stakes escalate at a dizzying speed. This is a tough, grim book, bloody and disconcerting, and not everyone's cup of tea. There's nothing comforting here, no easy answers; there's also nothing predictable in the way Leonard develops Harry Mitchell and his fight. But the writing is superb, clean-edged and wicked as a knife blade, and the result is a breakneck book with lots of thrills. (Avon, $2.95, 192 pp.)

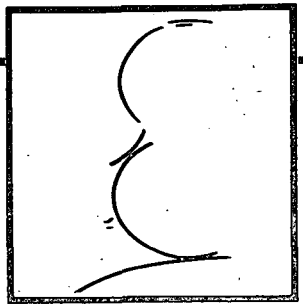
Bill Knox is a familiar name to many mystery lovers, and **The Hanging Tree** is the eighteenth novel to feature Detective Superintendent Colin Thane of Glasgow. Thane, along with his team of "regulars," is in fine fettle, and Knox again portrays Glasgow so graphically that one feels as if he's been there. (Certainly Bill Knox has!) This one also opens strongly: a young bicyclist accidentally rides into the middle of an armored car holdup and is brutally blown away. The killers are quickly caught, but Thane's job is just beginning because the dead boy was carrying a pirated tape of a yet-to-be-released American movie, one that has been heralded as a blockbuster and thus kept under very tight wraps. Thane's special squad is assigned to investigate, and the trail leads to, among others, an old girlfriend of Thane's. This is solid and well-plotted; good summer fare. (Doubleday Crime Club, $11.95, 179 pp.)

Father Robert Koesler makes a reappearance in William X. Kienzle's latest thriller, **Kill and Tell** (Andrews, McMeel & Parker, $12.95, 256 pp.). Perhaps not since the beloved Father Brown has there been a more popular priest-sleuth than Koesler, and one can readily see why. Koesler has a sense of humor, strong principles, a lively intelligence, and a few weak spots (which he's the first to admit to). In *Kill and Tell* a high-placed auto executive is murdered. The man was a parishioner of Koesler's and a good friend of the bishop's (who happens to be staying in Koesler's rectory). If you're interested in the bedroom and boardroom background of Detroit's auto industry, this is the book for you. Plenty of suspects and Koesler's comforting presence guarantee that reading *Kill and Tell* won't be a penance.

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



In **Mike's Murder** a girl learns that her tennis instructor and sometime lover has been murdered, and that he had secretly been a cheap drug hustler and male prostitute. These circumstances take some two hours to establish, during which time it misleadingly appears that a mystery is brewing.

Newcomer Mark Keyloun plays Mike, as unpleasant a young lout as any the drug culture has produced. During the hour or so he spends on screen, Mike inspires a fervent hope that the title, *Mike's Murder,* can really be counted on. It pains me to reflect that Shakespeare killed off the lively Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* early in the play, while the dreary Mike has been allowed to strut his hour on the stage.

Debra Winger is stuck with the role of the girlfriend who cannot forget her former lover, even though he obviously never cared for her—and she had no more than a passing interest in him. She sets out on what appears to be a search for Mike's murderer, but she turns out instead to be interested in something else. What that might be never quite comes clear. There must be some reason for her going around town to meet his unsavory friends, but the secret obviously rests in one of writer-director James Bridges' earlier drafts of the screenplay.

In the circumstances, the borrowings of mystery movie techniques quickly become ludicrous. The camera looks down from cranes, shoots from the side, and follows along behind Debra Winger as she drives to the house where Mike last hid out. But in the absence of any reason for the trip, no amount of camera work or anticipatory background music can lend interest to the sequence. There is

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an eccentric, wealthy recluse at Winger's destination, and he has a familiar kind of menacing bodyguard-servant. There isn't much going on in this house, though, nor in the rest of the movie for that matter.

James Bridges was once head writer for television's "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," but he seems to have forgotten everything he once had to know about developing character and situation.



James Stewart and Kim Novak in *Vertigo*.

A classic example of a movie calculated to rivet attention on the screen is Hitchcock's **Vertigo** (1958), now in re-release around the country. Jimmy Stewart's job—and eventually his sanity—depend on penetrating the mystery of Kim Novak's past. The viewer's eye goes with him in fascination as Stewart follows her car, peers at her in a cemetery, in a museum, at the foot of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, and in an old gothic house. Later, the viewer shares in Stewart's search of women's faces all over the city. The less Kim Novak acts, the more one is drawn to her face. She can hardly comb her hair without raising the hope that a clue will be imparted.

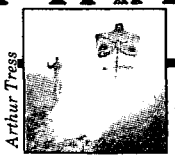
Arthur Kopit's new play, **End of the World,** tries to liven up an extended lecture on the folly of nuclear buildup by resorting to the detective and mystery genres. In order to write a play about the end of the world, Michael Trent has to penetrate the mystery of what really goes on at the Pentagon and in Washington strategic think tanks. He writes in a Sam Spade-like office, has a secretary he calls "doll face," and generally behaves like a private eye. He slinks around in a trenchcoat and slouch hat, lighting up one cigarette after another as he steps in and out of character to narrate the play.

Nothing is done with all these trappings, for the play is not really a mystery as advertised. Still, it's interesting that mystery is what the playwright and producer thought would bring in an audience to hear their ideas.

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THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The March Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Rich Gustafson of Richfield, Minnesota. Honorable mentions go to B. Newton of Saline, Michigan; Jan Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Vickie DuBois of Erath, Louisiana; Joseph F. Ricca, Jr., of Edison, New Jersey; Sherry Owens Austin of Concord, North Carolina; Alison Spitz of Oxford, Massachusetts; Elizabeth Doyle of Tres Pinos, California; Jim Aiello of Sea Cliff, New York; Jane Maciejewski of Lackawanna, New York; and Mary Maxine Parrish of Prairie Village, Kansas.

THE DUMMY AND SERGEANT MILLER by Rich Gustafson

I found Constable Parkins in the marsh behind Lord Knells' mansion, guarding a dressmaker's dummy. He saw me, grinned, and pointed his long walking stick at the dummy.

"Caught her nosing around the money, Sergeant Miller," he informed me. "Claimed she was just taking a stroll. Ha!" He confronted the dummy. "You were coming to get the money you put here yesterday, weren't you? 'Fess up!"

The dummy was silent.

Parkins turned to me with a sneer. "Been like that all morning. Won't say a thing."

I was about to reply when I caught sight of a high-backed armchair near Parkins. "What is he doing here?" I whispered.

"He's the groundskeeper," the constable told me. "Been here for hours. Don't worry, he's okay."

"You sure?" I thought for a moment. "What was Lord Knells' money in when it was stolen yesterday?"

"That suitcase we found here last night," Parkins answered. "Why?"

"The dressmaker's dummy is innocent. The only way the suitcase could have gotten out here was by being carried. THE DUMMY HAS NO ARMS!" Parkins gasped in sudden understanding as I drew my gun. I had it pointed at the armchair before he could move. "You are under arrest," I told him. He tried to get away, but sunk in the soft ground.

Parkins looked at me in wonder. "That was really smart," he said.

"Not really. I know the groundskeeper is actually a tip-top tea table. Besides, I never met an honest armchair."

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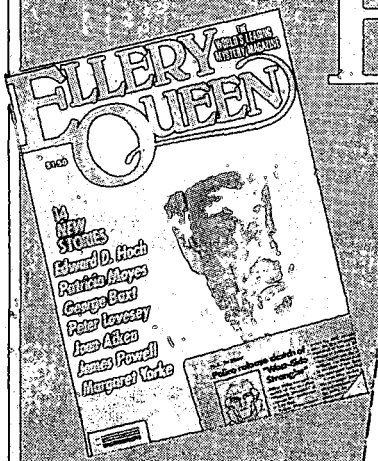
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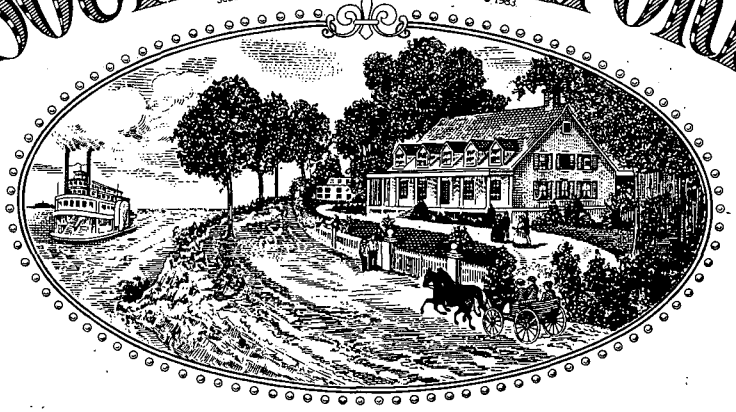
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